Where Are Special Operations Forces?

By JOHN M. COLLINS

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

Summary

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

**Performing Organization:**
National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319

**DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT:**
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

**Security Classification:**
- Report: Unclassified
- Abstract: Unclassified
- This Page: Unclassified

**LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT:**
Same as Report (SAR)

**NUMBER OF PAGES:**
10

**Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)**
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18
Subsequent accomplishments have been impressive. Institutionally, the office of the ASD (SO/LIC) as well as SOCOM headquarters and its Army, Navy, and Air Force component commands, theater Special Operations Commands (SOCs), and Army Special Operations Support Commands have been activated and staffed. SOCOM has codified relationships with regionally-oriented unified commands and the services. It also has created a planning, programming, and budgeting system and a research, development, and acquisition system as well as intelligence architectures for special operations. A new series of doctrinal publications guides their employment in peacetime, crises, and war. Teamwork between SOF and conventional forces is much improved. Approximately 2,500 SOF personnel serve in roughly forty countries on a constant basis (see chart on page 11), and they have played an important part in all major contingencies since Operation Desert Storm.

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

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

The Essence of SOF

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

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

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

SOF often are employable where high-profile conventional forces are politically, militarily, and/or economically inappropriate. Small, self-reliant, readily deployable units that capitalize on speed, surprise, audacity, and deception sometimes accomplish missions in ways that minimize risks of escalation and concurrently maximize returns compared with the orthodox applications of military power which normally emphasize mass. Aircraft, artillery, or combat engineers might demolish a critical bridge at a particular time, for example, but SOF could magnify the physical and psychological effects considerably if they blew that bridge while a
trainload of enemy dignitaries or ammuni-
tion was halfway across. Conventional land, sea, and air forces normally patrol specified sectors intermittently, whereas special recon-
naissance troops may remain in hostile ter-
ritory for weeks or months at a time collecting information that otherwise would be unob-
tainable. Severe misfortunes, however, may
 accompany failure. Large enemy conven-
tional forces can easily overwhelm small SOF
 units they manage to corner dur-
ing clandestine operations, and may be tempted to treat survivors harshly. Adverse political repercus-
sions can be far-reaching.

Nontraditional responsibili-
ties, such as humanitarian assis-
tance, are traditional roles for
Army Special Forces (SF) as well as
PSYOP and CA units. Their readi-
ness, in fact, improves while they
perform foreign internal defense missions,
whereas that of conventional forces nor-
mally declines, because such duties divert
time and attention away from primary re-
sponsibilities. Area orientation and language
skills attune SF (and some members of Sea-
Air-Land Teams or SEALs) to cultural nu-
ances that usually temper humanitarian as-
sistance techniques. Self-reliance allows
them to function effectively under austere
conditions without the infrastructure that
conventional forces often need.

ASD (SO/LIC) Accomplishments

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

Few ASD (SO/LIC) achievements have
been publicized. Most occurred quietly and
incrementally beneath the public eye. Their cu-
mulative influence on institutional relations,
policies, and plans nevertheless is consider-
able. A few illustrations include:

- Strengthened and clarified organizational
  relationships between ASD (SO/LIC) and SOCOM
  by developing ten mutually agreeable principles
  to improve coordination and oversight and by re-
solving legal disagreements over defining ele-
ments of ASD (SO/LIC) oversight and supervision
  of SOCOM activities.
- Successfully represented continuing needs
  for the Sensitive Special Operations Program on
  matters dealing with operational and policy deci-
sions during the DOD Intelligence reorganization.
  The ASD (SO/LIC) relationship with the intelli-
  gence community has proven to be a key ingredi-
  ent in negotiating sensitive intelligence support
  for the special operations community.
- Obtained the Secretary of Defense's ap-
  proval in March 1993 to designate PSYOP and CA
  as SOF which helped eliminate fragmentation of
  CA responsibilities among other OSD offices.
- Obtained Secretary of Defense approval in
  1988 to designate ASD (SO/LIC) as the single
  point of contact for DOD antiterrorism matters,
  thereby linking efforts of the Joint Staff, unified
  and specified commands, defense agencies, and
  the interagency antiterrorism community.
- Developed and promulgated policy direc-
tives regarding the planning, programming, bud-
ging, execution, and acquisition authority
  granted to SOCOM.
- Developed extensive input for the bottom-
  up review, a zero-based examination of roles for
  the Armed Forces in the emerging security envi-
  ronment. The project, aimed at improving SOF ef-
  fectiveness in accomplishing traditional and new
  missions, included policy proposals for strategic
  forward basing of SOF; afloat basing for SOF in re-
gions where land-based presence is not feasible; re-
search, development, and acquisition initiatives to
improve SOF contributions to counterprolifera-
tion; a range of activities to improve national assis-
tance capabilities; and recommendations concern-
ing such missions as peacekeeping, peace-making,
promoting democracy, and nonproliferation.
- Buttressed the national campaign to
counter the proliferation of weapons of mass de-
struction by ensuring that current SOF capabili-
ties are being integrated into key strategy docu-
ments and policy decisions and by sponsoring
multi-year, multi-agency research studies that ex-
plor emerging and potential counterprolifera-
tion roles for SOF.
Theater-Level Special Operations Commands

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

The regionally-oriented unified commands and SOCs rely upon the same basic sources of doctrine and policy for special operations. Annex E to the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan outlines missions, apportions assets to theater CINCs, and provides basic policy guidance. The 3-05 series of joint publications is being developed to dispense fundamental doctrine for special operations. Documents prepared by SOCOM and its component commands elaborate upon other issues while CINCs promulgate policies for their areas of responsibility (AORs).

Small special operations staff sections help CINCs plan and supervise all in-theater SOF activities, serve as conduits to and from SOCs, sometimes manage sensitive compartmented black programs, and also assist as required. The regionally-oriented SOCs exhibit unique characteristics such as perceived threats, geographic circumstances, types of contingencies, the intensity of crises, and other factors.

Special Operations Command, Atlantic (SOCLANT)

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

Special Operations Command, Central (SOCCENT)

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

Special Operations Command, Europe (SOCEUR)

U.S. European Command (EUCOM) is a well-developed theater that enjoyed a tope priority during the Cold War. Its AOR, stretching from Norway’s North Cape to the Cape of Good Hope, contains several trouble spots and potential flash points of which Bosnia-Herzegovina, Libya, Liberia, Israel, and South Africa are the most prominent. Refugees from the Balkans, right-wing nationalists in Germany, unrest in Russia and neighboring states, and transnational terrorism are among Europe’s security concerns. SOCEUR is located in Vahingen, Germany. Forward-based SOF units controlled by SOCEUR include a Special Forces battalion in Germany, a Naval Special Warfare Unit in Scotland, and an Air Force Special Operations Group in England that consists of three squadrons of MC-130 Combat Talons, MH-53J Pave Low helicopters, and HC-130 Combat Shadows. Active and Reserve PSYOP units also provide support and a Reserve CA command periodically augments the CINC’s staff.

Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH)

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

Special Operations Command, Pacific (SOPAC)

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

SOF Deployments: A Snapshot of a Typical Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of 30 Jan–6 Feb 1993</th>
<th>Missions</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONUS</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACOM AOR</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUCOM AOR</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTCOM AOR</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANTCOM AOR</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTHCOM AOR</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>2517</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Autumn 1993 / JFQ

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

Special Operations Command, Korea (SOC-K)

Korea is the only theater in which American and allied SOF are institutionally integrated. Located in Seoul, SOC-K is a standing joint task force controlled by the Commander, U.S. Forces Korea. It serves the Republic of Korea (ROK)/U.S. Combined Forces Command, as a component of the Combined Unconventional Warfare Task Force, and works closely with the Korean Army Special Warfare Command. Since the Koreans furnish most in-theater SOF, the fact that SOC-K has control over only one Special Forces detachment is not significant. In the event of hostilities SOC-K combines with the ROK Special Warfare Command to form the Combined Unconventional Warfare Task Force.

DOD

AC-130 Spectre illuminating the night sky.
Initiated and secured agreement from the National Defense University (NDU) and SOCOM on creating, funding, and filling a SOF faculty chair beginning in academic year 1993–94. Follow-on activities include establishing both a SOF archive in the NDU Library and a post-senior service college fellowship within the Institute for National Strategic Studies at NDU.

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

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

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

Prognoses now seem bright in most respects, according to the SOCOM J–2. Interagency cooperation concerning human intelligence (HUMINT) is much better since Operation Just Cause (Panama 1989–90). SOCOM is collaborating with all the services in efforts to prototype and test new, lighter, smaller, interoperable intelligence systems needed for the type conflicts anticipated. The most important initiatives may reach fruition because SOF intelligence programs for FY93 through FY99 are reportedly well supported in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill.

SOCOM planners, using scenarios and computer models, seek to answer four fundamental questions: how many SOF and supporting airlift/sealift platforms of what sort are needed to accomplish anticipated missions in specific theaters, subregions, countries, and other areas? What forces will be available to satisfy inferred requirements at particular times in the future? What risks result when projected SOF capabilities appear insufficient? What courses of action might reduce those risks, including actions to employ programmed assets more effectively?

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

Force Posture Improvements. Better weapons, equipment, personnel, and integrating structures are evident in SOCOM and among SOF in unified commands. Concentrated education and training help commanders make the most of available assets. Revitalization continues at modest cost compared with funding for conventional forces. FY94 budget requests for procurement, personnel, operations, maintenance, research, development, test, evaluation, and military construction comprise little more than one penny out of every DOD dollar.
All Army and Navy SOF are volunteers. Most demonstrate superior performance during tours with conventional forces before they volunteer. Recruiting practices vary with each service (Navy SEALs, for example, take some volunteers straight from basic training, but Army SF do not), although standards are uniformly high. Strict professionalism thereafter prevails. CINCSOC and component commanders work hard to eradicate misperceptions that Rambo-style snake eaters and recklessly, out-of-control individuals typify SOF personnel because discipline and maturity help make SOF unique.

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

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

SOCOM operates its own school system. The John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg develops doctrine and conducts courses for all Army SOF and Foreign Area Officers (FAO). The Naval Special Warfare Center at the Amphibious Base Coronado and the Air Force Special Operations School at Hurlburt Field do likewise within their respective spheres. All instruct for personnel from other departments and agencies. Intensive, extensive, and diversified courses of instruction cover a wide range of subjects and scenarios. Members of small, self-contained teams concentrate on cross-training (demolition experts may not become fully proficient as radio operators or medics, but must be qualified to perform such duties in an emergency). SOCOM also cultivates linguistic and cross-cultural skills, which many SOF need to accomplish regional security missions in an ever more complex world. Conventional units do not match their competence.

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

Residual Problems

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

SOCOM Battle Staffs. Each SOC currently relies extensively on Reserve component augmentation packets for major exercises and emergencies. All eagerly await the formation of SOCOM Battle Staffs. Two battle rosters list primary and alternate active duty personnel who are assigned to SOCOM headquarters. Members of the first roster must be ready to deploy within 24 hours after notification. They possess operations, intelligence, communications, logistics, and other skills that theater SOCs are known to need most. The maximum number ready to surge is 29. Alternate and selected personnel from SOCOM’s component commands constitute the second roster, whose members could fill additional requirements for not more than 29 commissioned and noncommissioned officers. They prepare to follow within one week. Anticipated capabilities, however, will not be available until SOCOM acquires sufficient weapons and makes them immediately available for use by personnel on the two battle rosters.
Career Opportunities. Promotion and advancement vary for SOF personnel from better than average to poor, depending on present rank, service idiosyncrasies, and specialties. Rear admirals, Air Force major generals, Air Force helicopter pilots, and Army SF officers encounter “glass promotion ceilings.” SEALs and Reserve component CA and PSYOP officers, who are few in number and in constant demand, find little time to attend military schools and colleges. SOF in several categories find assignment potential quite limited. Title 10, U.S. Code, tells CINC-SOC to monitor such matters, which are parent service responsibilities, but he has little ability to reverse adverse trends.

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

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

Civil Affairs. CINCSOC, SOCOM component commanders, regionally-oriented CINCs, theater SDCs, and their respective staffs believe that an undesirable balance exists between active and Reserve component SOF-qualified flag officers from a multi-service pool of candidates should ideally compete for every senior command and staff position within SOCOM headquarters, component commands, and theater SDCs. A relatively small reservoir now exists, however, partly because SOF generals and admirals find it difficult to progress within the special operations community after they pin on the first star, partly because non-SOF officers fill many key slots.

Language Training. Many members of the Armed Forces are fluent in common foreign languages such as French, German, and Spanish. Sufficien...
A prescription for applying political, military, economic, and other instruments of national power to promote regional stability, diminish threats, facilitate combat operations if deterrence fails, foster post-crisis recovery, and otherwise enhance U.S. security.

Peacetime engagement concepts employ military forces, but not military force. SOF are especially well suited, because they deter aggression primarily through good deeds, whereas conventional forces promise military retaliation. Low-key SOF maximize U.S. influence in selected countries through military-to-military contacts, information programs, and civic actions; minimize prospects of unpleasant surprise by conducting special reconnaissance missions; and garner good will in the aftermath of natural catastrophes and conflicts by taking care of afflicted peoples. The following are some recent employments:

- A Special Mission Unit provided counterterrorism training, equipment, and weapons to security forces in the Republic of Georgia
- SOF succored thousands of Kurdish refugees along the Iraqi-Turkish border where all but 3 of 250 children declared hopeless by local doctors were saved by SOF medics
- CA specialists entered Kuwait City on liberation day with local counterparts and directed deliveries of food, water, and medical supplies, then restored health and other public services
- SOF medical personnel inoculated 60,000 people in Cameroon over a 10-day period during a meningitis epidemic at a minuscule cost by using donated American vaccines
- Russian speaking SOF facilitated safe passage for U.S. military cargo aircraft flying through restricted air corridors during Operation Provide Hope to deliver food and medicine within the Commonwealth of Independent States
- SOF assisted relief efforts in Bangladesh after Cyclone Marian, and performed similar duty in Dade County, Florida, following Hurricane Andrew.
- SOF combat operations in Grenada (1983), Panama (1989–90), and Kuwait/Iraq (1990–91) displayed other capabilities; forces committed to Desert Storm performed all ten statutory missions with positive results.
As a consequence SOF are in demand in peace as well as war, and the potential for overcommitment is constant. Since the root cause is too few forces for too many tasks, senior officials would be well advised to exercise restraint in employing SOF.

Future Effectiveness

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

The President might:

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

Congress might:

- establish special operations panels or subcommittees on the Senate and the House Armed Services Committees to facilitate oversight.
- authorize a three-star deputy CINCSOC and also allocate one star to each theater SOC; a larger pool of well qualified candidates thereafter could compete for senior command and staff assignments within SOCOM
- authorize additional active duty CA units
- relax some existing research, development, and acquisition regulations to make SOF-peculiar systems more responsive.

The Secretary of Defense might:

- nominate a special operations practitioner as the ASD (SO/LIC) and a SOF-qualified individual as principal deputy
- direct the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, to furnish SOCOM with seasoned SOF.

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, might:

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

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

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

Prognosis

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