

TACTICAL SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND CONVENTIONAL  
FORCE INTERDEPENDENCE: THE FUTURE OF  
LAND FORCE DEVELOPMENT

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General Studies

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## ABSTRACT

TACTICAL SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND CONVENTIONAL FORCE  
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As the United States concludes a decade of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan the Army is focused on capturing lessons learned in order to build an operationally adaptive future land force. Operational adaptability is the Army's broad strategy to address a complex foe operating in a population-centric environment. The Army demonstrated operational adaptability to varying degrees over time in Iraq and Afghanistan as it sought new and innovative ways to wage counterinsurgency warfare. The ultimate example of operational adaptability is the village stability operations (VSO) program in Afghanistan. The VSO program consists of interdependent special operations and conventional forces integrated at the tactical level, with unity of effort and command, working to stabilize and connect rural Afghan villages to the Afghan central government. Study of the development of the VSO program and the interdependence that makes the program work provides insights into operational adaptability. Ensuring these lessons are inculcated across the institutional Army through such means as doctrinal development of the human domain and the 7<sup>th</sup> war fighting function will ensure the Army can rapidly adapt to future operating environments. The United States cannot afford to invest another decade into learning how to succeed in population-centric conflict.

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## ACRONYMS

ACC	United States Army Capstone Concept
ADRP	Army Doctrinal Reference Publication
AOC	United States Army Operating Concept
ARSOF	Army Special Operations Forces
CAM	Combined Arms Maneuver
CF	Conventional Forces
DoD	Department of Defense
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
JP	Joint Publication
PME	Professional Military Education
SFA	Security Force Assistance
SO	Special Operations
SOF	Special Operations Forces
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
VSO	Village Stability Operations
WAS	Wide Area Security
WfF	Warfighting Function

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For the first time since 2001 the U.S. Military faces a shift in strategy and a reduction in resources. The world strategic situation grows more complex as a period of persistent conflict has developed in an increasingly complex and connected world. Critical to the defense of the United States is the ability of the Department of Defense (DoD) to gain efficiencies with resources while simultaneously increasing capabilities. The solution is to develop the Army into a more operationally adaptive force. As stated in the U.S. Army Capstone Concept (ACC), “The fundamental characteristic of the Army necessary to provide decisive landpower is operational adaptability . . . Operational adaptability requires flexible organizations and institutions to support a wide variety of missions and adjust focus rapidly to prevent conflict, shape the operational environment, and with the Nation’s wars” (Department of the Army 2012b, 11). One key aspect of improving the ability of the U.S. Army function as an operationally adaptive force is to develop stronger interdependence between Conventional Forces (CF) and Special Forces (SOF) (Department of the Army 2012b, 16). However, there are challenges to enhancing interdependence, and if these challenges are not addressed, the tenuous connections developed out of necessity between CF and SOF during the last decade will fade. The start point for the Army to address these challenges is understanding the answers to two key questions: how did the Army develop tactical level SOF-CF interdependence to the extent at which it is exercised today and what actions must the institutional Army take to enable the organizational flexibility necessary to implement tactical SOF-CF interdependence rapidly on future battlefields?

The United States is a world leader at a time when international dynamics are becoming more complex and the U.S. Congress is limiting defense spending (Department of the Army 2012b, 11). Regardless of complexity and limitation, the U.S. military will continue to play a major role in U.S. international policy. In response to anticipated future requirements, the DoD has developed an ambitious plan to create a less expensive force with more capabilities. In his opening letter in *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) writes, “This country is at a strategic turning point after a decade of war and, therefore, we are shaping a Joint Force for the future that will be smaller and leaner, but will be agile, flexible, ready, and technologically advanced” (Department of Defense 2012). The implication here is that the “bloat” in our military today will be removed from the force, and the U.S. will engage international threats with what remains. What international threats will this future force face?

According to Joint Publication (JP) 1, “Political and military leaders must consider the employment of military force in operations characterized by a complex, interconnected, and global operational environment” (Department of Defense 2013, I-14). If a theorist considers the past, state-versus-state, model for international relations normal, then he must consider the new model, characterized by a “complex and uncertain environment” where “competition for wealth, resources, political authority, sovereignty, and legitimacy” occur in an “increasingly competitive and interconnected world,” an irregular model (Department of the Army 2012b, 6). The irregular threat that emerges from this model is “rapidly evolving and adaptive” with the capability to employ, anti-access and area denial strategies, innovative tactics, and advanced technologies to oppose

U.S. security interests” (Department of the Army 2012b, 6). Among other efforts the U.S. must make to remain a relevant leader in this new irregular environment, the DoD must shape a force that can operate in that kind of an irregular world order and against such a transnational, hybrid, and irregular threat. The DoD has such a force, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).

In 1986 Congress, concerned about the status of SOF within overall U.S. defense planning, passed measures P.L 99-661. This measure established USSOCOM. In 2004, USSOCOM was given the responsibility for synchronizing plans against global terrorist networks and conducting operations against those networks. In 2008, USSOCOM became the proponent for Security Force Assistance (SFA) to synchronized training and assistance to other nations. Finally, USSOCOM recently became DoD’s lead for countering threat financing in order to identify and disrupt terrorist financing efforts (Feickert 2012, 2). The important aspect of this evolution is the observation that, as the complexity of the threat has increased, so has our nation’s reliance on SOF to respond to and resolve the threat. Leadership in the U.S. Government and the DoD recognized that most agile tool available to address emerging complex threats to the nation was and remains the capabilities of USSOCOM. The current and future operating environment will require an effective use of SOF.

To capture a key feature of the new, complex environment of international relations, the “human domain” has emerged to join the other domains of war (land, air, maritime, space, and cyberspace). A good definition of the human domain is the totality of physical, cultural and social environments that influence human behavior to the extent that success of a military operation or campaign depends on the application of unique

capabilities that are designed to fight and win population-centric conflicts (Sacolick and Grigsby 2012, 40).

The Army theoretically works to insure conventional force doctrine, organization, training, material, institution, personnel, and facilities (DOTMILPF) are set up to allow CF to succeed in Army core competencies of combined arms maneuver (CAM) and wide area security (WAS). Of the two core competencies, CAM can be considered “regular” or conventional warfare. CAM is defined as “the application of the elements of combat power in unified action to defeat enemy ground forces; to seize, occupy, and defend land areas; and to achieve physical, temporal, and psychological advantages over the enemy to seize and exploit the initiative” (Department of the Army 2012d, 2-9). Though the human domain is a factor during CAM, the human domain becomes much more important during the execution of WAS.

WAS is defined as, “the application of the elements of combat power in unified action to protect populations, forces, infrastructure, and activities; to deny the enemy positions of advantage; and to consolidate gains in order to retain the initiative” (Department of the Army 2012d, 2-9). Key difference between CAM and WAS is the focus of the application of elements of combat power. In CAM, combat power is applied against the enemy. In WAS combat power is applied to protect the population. Added focus on the population means added emphasis on the human domain.

Operating in the human domain should be considered irregular operations. Success in the human domain depends on factors beyond closing with and destroying the enemy. The key characteristic for conventional combat arms branches of the Army is the capability of branches such as infantry, armor, and aviation to conduct CAM. If a focus

on defeating the enemy can be considered a “regular” focus, then the WAS focus on protecting the population should be considered an irregular role for CF. To succeed in WAS, those CF tasked to provide security to a population require irregular capabilities.

For more than a decade, our nation has engaged in population-centric warfare and, over that same time, SOF has taken on increasing responsibilities in implementing the military instrument of American foreign policy. As we move beyond the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, the world will remain complex. Senior leaders have developed strategy and resource guidance appropriately. The president writes in the introductory letter to *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, “In particular, we will continue to invest in the capabilities critical to future success, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; counterterrorism; countering weapons of mass destruction; operating in anti-access environments; and prevailing in all domains, including cyber” (Department of Defense 2012). To implement this vision for future capabilities, SOF capabilities must be supported by CF force capabilities.

Army leadership views a strong relationship between CF and SOF as key to enabling future operations. Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), GEN Raymond T. Odierno, writes that “As Army regular forces become available, they will increasingly integrate with Army Special Operations Forces to promote trust and interoperability with allies and build partner nation capacity where mutual interests are at risk from internal or external enemies” (Department of the Army 2012a, 5). This statement shows the intent that Army CF fall in on and complement missions that SOF already conduct. The question is: what will be nature of future SOF and CF integration?

A new operating environment and a new strategic setting require a new look at interdependence between SOF and CF with a focus on winning a population-centric conflict in an era of persistent conflict. Current speculation in congress and the DoD indicates that CF will become smaller, and SOF will stay about the same size. There is no indication that the complex threat to our nation has lessened or that an irregular (i.e. population-centric) response to that threat should change. Though the DoD is interested in expanding SOF, there are practical limits to SOF expansion due to the high standards and long training lead times required for most special operations specialties (Feickert 2012, Summary). The solution to the challenge of shaping a future force with the capability to effectively employ the military instrument of power is to better integrate SOF and CF. Enhancing interdependence between SOF and CF is a key aspect of how the DoD seeks to shape the future joint force to fight and win.

Interdependence is a key term for describing the interaction between SOF and CF. There is not a well articulated definition for SOF-CF interdependence. Joint doctrine discusses interdependence between services. JP 3-0, Operations, defines joint (or strategic level) interdependence as “the purposeful reliance by one Service on another Service’s capabilities to maximize the complementary and reinforcing effects of both; the degree of interdependence varies with specific circumstances” (Department of Defense 2011a, IV-6). In the *Joint Chiefs Strategic Direction to the Joint Force*, GEN Dempsey provides further context for the usefulness of interdependence as he describes the future joint force: “Our aim should be a versatile, responsive, and decisive Joint Force that is also affordable. . . . It means interdependence—Services that rely on each other to achieve objectives and create capabilities that do not exist except when combined. It means a

regionally-postured, but globally networked and flexible force that can be scaled and scoped to demand” (Chairman 2012b, 7).

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, interdependence applied to Army SOF and CF, is the deliberate reliance by each force on the other force’s unique capabilities to maximize the complementary and reinforcing effects of both. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-05, *Special Operations* describes the capabilities of an effectively employed interdependent force when it states “Interdependence between special operations forces and conventional forces will increase the effectiveness of shaping activities and improve execution of counterterrorism and irregular warfare”(Department of the Army 2012e, 16). A high level of interdependence between SOF and CF has been developed over the last decade out of operational necessity, but a more cohesive special operations and conventional force effort will improve the Army’s ability to execute decisive action by combining the capability advantages of each force. In the article “Special Operations/Conventional Forces Interdependence: A Critical Role in ‘Prevent, Shape, Win’” the authors state the “Army must seamlessly integrate lethal and nonlethal special operations and conventional force capabilities while maintaining unique cultures and capabilities that shape the environment and enable success of the joint force in the operational environment” (Sacolick and Grigsby 2012, 40)

Today in Afghanistan the ultimate example of operational adaptability and SOF-CF interdependence is the Village Stability Operations (VSO) program. Realizing that securing the rural population was essential to the overall counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy in Afghanistan and understanding that the best way to do so was to build on Afghan traditional methods of security and governance, the Army embedded SOF teams

into rural Afghan villages. These teams stabilize the villages using methods in line with Afghan culture and history and then, working with an intimate knowledge of culture and tribal politics, develop governance ties between the villages and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). Though the pilot program proved successful, expansion of the program proved difficult given that there were not enough SOF in Afghanistan to conduct this mission the extent necessary to make a difference. To solve this problem, CF was introduced in order to enable SOF to expand the program into all regions of Afghanistan (Whiteside 2013, Introduction). The end result is fully integrated, interoperable, and interdependent SOF-CF teams operating with unity of command and unity of effort to secure and develop the rural villages in Afghanistan.

Development of the VSO program highlights the current state of Army operational adaptability. By examining lessons learned over the course of a decade of conflict that ultimately led to such intricate integration of SOF and CF, this study will attempt to determine what further steps the Army must take to ensure those lessons lead to institutionalization of systems and practices to enable faster employment of interdependent SOF-CF capabilities on future battlefields.

The Army innovated when it shifted from enemy-centric to population-centric operations. This innovation should guide how the Army develops the future force. SOF and CF each exist to bring certain unique capabilities to the battlefield in order to influence the enemy and population. This study will examine SOF and CF interaction in the context of the VSO program in order to understand why the Army developed the program and then try to determine why such a detailed integration of SOF and CF was necessary for the program to achieve the desired results. Finally, given an understanding

of the background and advantages of the implementation of the VSO program, this study will make recommendations for further institutionalization.

Throughout this paper, this study will refer to joint phasing guidelines in order to simplify description of types of military operations. The phases, in sequence, are phase 1: shape, phase 2: deter, phase 3: seize initiative, phase 4: dominate, phase 5: stabilize, and phase 6: enable civil authority. During the phase 1, military activities are conducted to dissuade or deter adversaries from conducting unfavorable military actions. The intent of the phase 2 type operations is to show the will to use friendly military capability in order to prevent adversaries from conducting unfavorable military activities. Phase 3 is conducted through decisive use of joint force capabilities and is what most would consider conventional type military operations such as offensive and defensive operations. The phase 4, also characterized by conventional use of military force, is focused on breaking the enemy will to resist and controlling the operating environment. Phase 5 is when there is an operational shift from sustained combat operations to primarily stability operations. Finally, phase 6 is focused on providing military force support to enable legitimate civil governance (Department of Defense 2011a, V-8). VSO operations are occurring in Afghanistan as operations there shift from phase 5 to phase 6. However, throughout operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, examples of SOF-CF interdependence occur in phases 3 to 6.

A few key assumptions are necessary for this study. First, that there will be minimal change to equipment or force ratios. Second, that there will be no change to strategic level Command and Control (C2). Finally, at the time of this writing, future

resourcing for the DoD looks limited. Recommendations that require vast resources for implementation will not be considered.

SOF-CF interdependence is not a new concept. What is new is the strategic environment in terms of threats, resources, and public opinion. In order for the U.S. Military to create a more agile and capable force with fewer resources, the U.S. Military must find a way to gain efficiencies by building on past investments in technology and people. The U.S. Military must also take advantage of lessons that emerged from the last decade of population-centric warfare which built tenuous connections between SOF and CF that are now at risk as those conflicts end.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary question for this thesis focuses on determining how tactical level SOF-CF interdependence of the VSO program developed and how lessons from the development process can better enable Army operational adaptability. The key to finding the answer to this question is understanding the differences between the two forces in terms of how they operate, what they are capable of doing, the vision for what an interdependent force can and must accomplish to enable operational adaptability, and how that vision for future capabilities meets requirements articulated in the strategic vision for future force employment. Therefore, to answer the research question, this study focuses on current doctrine for SOF and CF, relevant articles and reports that provide insights into the future strategic direction for the Army, insights into SOF current activity and initiatives, articles and information papers that provide perspective on the integration of SOF and CF, and VSO case studies. Research is deliberately limited to articles and reports published after the most recent strategic review, though some older publications offered relevant insights.

Doctrine review. The starting point for the doctrine review for this thesis is ADRP 3-05, *Special Operations*. Contained within this reference publication are several useful doctrinal explanations for the capabilities, characteristics, operational mission criteria, core operations and activities, and interdependence. This publication also provides a detailed description of the capabilities of Army SOF (ARSOF) operations and operators. The theme that emerges is that ARSOF works through and with host nations (HNs), regional partners, and indigenous populations in a culturally attuned manner.

In terms of CF doctrine, there no single publication that describes the capabilities, characteristics, operational mission criteria, and core operations and activities of conventional forces. Instead, general Joint and Army doctrine applies. To help focus research on relevant conventional doctrinal publications, ADRP 3-05 remains useful by defining the difference between the CF and SOF. The ADRP notes that conventional forces are trained to conduct decisive action (offense, defense, stability, and defense support of civil authorities) (Department of the Army 2012e, 1-15). Therefore, key publications include ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, ADRP 3-90, *Offense and Defense*, and ADRP 3-07, *Stability*. Finally, JP 3-22 provides detailed useful information on Foreign Internal Defense (FID).

ADRP 3-0 provides the framework for how to employ the Army as the military instrument of national power. Within this framework, Army CF activities demonstrate the Army core competencies through decisive action. Those competencies consist of CAM and wide area security WAS (Department of the Army 2012d, 2-1).

ADRP 3-90 essentially provides more detail on how CF will execute decisive action at a tactical level within the framework introduce in ADRP 3-0. This publication focuses on how conventional forces will fight at the tactical level; that is the level of war at which battles and engagements are executed to achieve military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces (Department of the Army 2012g, 1-1). ADRP 3-90 is focused on how conventional forces execute CAM. WAS tasks are covered in ADRP 3-07.

ADRP 3-07 is solely focused on the stability aspect of decisive action. It immediately notes that military forces alone are not designed or intended to achieve a sustainable peace without a larger cooperative effort of other instruments of national

power, international organizations, and the host nations (Department of the Army 2012f, v). When discussing stability operations in the context of a larger cooperative effort, we see a mention of SOF and CF interaction. This interaction is discussed in the section referring to FID.

JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, is an important reference which provides the doctrinal framework for how U.S. forces conduct FID. JP 3-22 is relevant to this thesis because FID provides an excellent example of interdependence between SOF and CF.

The most interesting aspect of this portion of the review is that all of the doctrine reviewed for this thesis had been recently revised to address current and future threats and challenges. Because of the recent revision, current doctrine seems mostly relevant and does provide obstacles to further interdependence between CF and SOF. ADRP 3-0 was published in May 2012, ADRP 3-05, 3-07, and 3-90 were published in August 2012, and JP 3-22 (the oldest) was last updated on 12 July 2010. The fact that doctrine appears relevant shows that the Department of the Army (DA) is focused on keeping doctrine, and by extension Army forces, in line with the realities of present and future threats. However, the question remains: what is the Army doing to insure doctrine is properly applied? Further research provides insight.

Though a doctrine review can prescribe how U.S. Armed forces will implement the military instrument of national power, including articles, reports, and other professional writings in the literature review is essential in order to gain a deeper perspective on interdependence between SOF and CF. Grouped broadly, these articles and reports fell into four categories: Future Strategic Direction for the Army and

Implementing Change, Insights into SOF, Integration of SOF and CF, and VSO specific case studies and lessons learned.

DoD published several documents in the wake of the strategic guidance published by the current presidential administration in January 2012. On 15 June 2012, the Joint Staff published *Decade of War, Volume I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations*, otherwise known as the Decade of War Study (DWS). This study was initiated by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to “make sure we actually learn the lessons of the last decade of war” (Chairman 2012a, v). After reviewing 46 lessons learned studies and compiling over 400 findings, observations, and practices, the study came up with 11 strategic themes (Chairman 2012a, 2). It is interesting to note that, of the 11 strategic themes identified, 7 of the themes were either types of operations SOF either directly executes or is closely associated with. Those seven themes are: understanding the environment, battle for the narrative, SOF-CF integration, interagency coordination, coalition operations, host nation partnering, and use of surrogates and proxies (Chairman 2012a, 2). This is important to the thesis because it highlights how important the role of SOF is to the joint force in implementing the military instrument of U.S. national power.

The start point for understanding the future of SOF-CF interdependence for the Army is found within the ACC. Published five months after the DWS, this document describes “the anticipated future operational environment, what the future Army must do based on that environment, and the broad capabilities the Army will require to accomplish its enduring missions successfully in the near to mid-term future” (Department of the Army 2012b, 4). This document essentially sets the agenda to drive change throughout the Army in order enable the force to effectively respond to a “broad

range of threats and challenges” while simultaneously reducing the force (Department of the Army 2012b, 5). Relevant to this thesis, the ACC states that the human domain will remain relevant in the future and that the Army requires a war fighting function to influence the “decisions and behavior of a people, its security forces, and its government.” The concept is that this warfighting function (WfF) will institutionalize the functions associated with long-term population engagement operations and develop interdependence between Army CF and SOF (Department of the Army 2012b, 16).

The United States Army Operating Concept (AOC) expands on the ideas of the ACC by describing employment of forces and identifying capabilities required for future success. The central idea of the AOC is, in order to succeed in future conflicts; Army forces must be “capable of combined arms maneuver and wide area security within the context of joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational efforts” (Department of the Army 2010, 11). The guidance given within the AOC directly relates to the latest revisions in Army doctrine. Relevant to this thesis, the AOC discusses the concept behind regionally aligned forces and how to expand capabilities at tactical levels.

Finally, in terms of strategic direction for the Army, the U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities held a hearing on institutionalizing irregular warfare capabilities. In his opening statement, the subcommittee chairman, Hon. Mac Thornberry, noted that 83% of official conflicts conducted by the U.S. armed forces since 1815 were irregular conflicts against non-state actors. He noted that future was likely to involve some form of irregular warfare and that the U.S. must maintain a “full spectrum of capability” (U.S. House 2011, 1). Relevant to this thesis, the statements given by members of the committee and testimony given by

representatives from all branches of service indicated that CF must have the capability to conduct successful operations in irregular environments. Specifically, irregular battlefields will require adaptation of both SOF and CF that “must work together as part of a joint force and an interagency team” (U.S. House 2011, 3).

Numerous documents and articles address the transformation of the Army to effectively operate as outlined in the ACC and the AOC. The CSA provides insights into how he envisions this transformation. In “Today’s Army: The Strength of our Nation,” the CSA discusses the strategic environment, continued importance of landpower, improving capabilities, retaining readiness, modernization, and stewardship of the profession. Relevant to this thesis, in terms of improving capabilities, he discusses the importance of interdependence between CF and SOF writing that SOF and CF “work better together than apart” (Odierno 2012b, 30). To firm up the relationship between the two forces, he writes that multiple iterations at Maneuver Combat Training centers will cement “the relationships between conventional and SOF units across the operational and institutional army” (Odierno 2012b, 30).

In “America’s Army the Nation’s Force of Decisive Action,” the CSA again discusses the importance of sustaining a long-term relationship between CF and SOF, writing that SOF “cannot operate without the support of the Army” (Odierno 2012a, 28). Also of importance is that he writes that the Joint Force requires a “strong, versatile, expeditionary Army to meet our nation’s security needs,” (Odierno 2012a, 28) and that among the missions this force will be called upon to perform is deterring and defeating aggression, conducting irregular warfare, and supporting counterterrorism.

Establishing an accurate picture of the current capabilities, priorities, strategic and institutional direction of SOF is necessary in order to ensure this thesis is relevant and current. The nature of SOF causes these attributes to shift rapidly as missions and situation change. Probably as a product of always looking to adjust capabilities to meet and defeat threats, SOF thinkers constantly look to develop initiatives to give U.S. forces an edge. Key trends in SOF thinking are development of a Special Operations (SO) WfF, SOF professional military education (PME), and integration of SOF and CF. The following key articles and reports were utilized to expand and update doctrinal understanding of SOF and current SOF thinking.

Published in 2007, at the height of the SOF activity in the OIF and OEF theaters, *A Theory of Special Operations, the Origin Qualities, and Use of SOF* provides insight into the capabilities of SOF as a standalone force and in the context of an enemy-centric strategy as opposed to a population-centric strategy. The author focuses on the qualities of SOF that enable SOF to accomplish missions that CF are not capable of accomplishing. This report is useful because it methodically illustrated the differences between SOF and CF and established a concept for how uniquely SOF capabilities should be employed beyond merely complementing CF activities.

Factual information provided to the U.S. Congress provides further technical insight into SOF. The report, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress*, has information on the current status of U.S. military SOF in terms of size, budget, and current challenges. This report focuses on the challenges SOF will face in light of presidential strategic guidance issued in January of 2012. The report notes SOF may be challenged to meet further operational requirements because SOF physical

expansion is hampered by the necessary requirement to maintain “stringent qualification and training standards” (Feickert 2012, summary).

Moving beyond just understanding the nature and employment of SOF, several studies over the last decade have addressed specific challenges to integrating SOF and CF. One current important proposal is to institutionalize SOF-CF integration by adding a SO WfF to the current doctrinal list of WfFs. As mentioned before, the AOC addressed the concept of adding an additional WfF. However, defining the extent of that WfF is extremely challenging. The monograph, “Operational Art and the Clash of Organizational Cultures: Postmortem on Special Operations (SO) as a Seventh Warfighting Function,” published in October 2011, discusses the recent failure of the USSOCOM’s proposal to add SO as a seventh WfF. Note that the terms “SO WfF” and “7th WfF” are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. In examining why a SO WfF was rejected, the author notes a significant divergence between SOF and CF subcultures which in turn presents a formidable obstacle in institutionalizing SOF-CF interdependence (Gleiman 2011, 6). Taking the steps necessary to break down the cultural barriers between SOF and CF is an important consideration for SOF-CF integration and interdependence.

The article, “Special Operations as a Warfighting Function” further amplifies the need for a WfF focused on assisting planners and leaders in understanding and effectively employing SOF capabilities to the battlefield. The author argues that without a SO WfF it is less likely that a conventional commander and staff will consider the capabilities of SOF during operations planning (Thomas 2011, 10). To effectively institutionalize SOF and CF integration/interdependence, the normal Army doctrinal modification processes common to each force should be modified. Both SOF and CF look to the war fighting

functions as a way to organize planning and execution of operations (Thomas 2011, 8). This article provided valuable insight to this thesis by explaining that the SOF community views the creation of a seventh war fighting function as essential to institutionalizing SOF-CF integration at all levels.

Closely connected to the SO WfF concept is the concept of the human domain. In the article “Special Operations-Conventional Forces Interdependence: A critical role in ‘Prevent, Shape, Win’” the authors describe the human domain as “the totality of the physical, cultural and social environments that influence human behavior to the extent that success of any military operation or campaign depends on the application of unique capabilities that are designed to fight and win population-centric conflicts” (Sacolick and Grigsby 2012, 40). The concept of the human domain is the “cognitive foundation” for the SO WfF’s “lethal and nonlethal capabilities to assess, shape, deter and influence foreign security environments” (Sacolick and Grigsby 2012, 40). The authors argue that by institutionalizing the SO WfF and the human domain, the Army will provide a framework to support and employ the “complementary capabilities of special operations and conventional forces” (Sacolick and Grigsby 2012, 40).

This article also provided a starting point for understanding the future interdependent relationship between CF and SOF. Building on the concepts of the human domain and the 7th WfF, or SO WfF, the article offers a roadmap to the Army for developing and implementing SOF-CF interdependence. The key concept of the article was to operationalize and institutionalize interdependence. To do so, the article advocates fixing doctrine, informing all levels of PME, and integrating and maintaining the unique cultures and capabilities of each force (Sacolick and Grigsby 2012, 40). The article does

not provide specific details about what was wrong with doctrine, or what unique cultures and capabilities must be maintained and integrated. However, the general concepts provided a focus area of study for this thesis.

The article, “ARSOF Officer Education at Fort Leavenworth,” published in January of 2012, is interesting because the article highlights a key difference in the institutional development of SOF officers as opposed to CF officers. Though the article does not provide analysis between the two courses of PME, the fact that SOF officers have an exclusive specialized directed course of study shows how the idea of integration has not been fully institutionalized. Including CF officers in the some of the same PME SOF officers receive, or providing more SOF PME to CF officers, will enable CF commanders and staff to better understand the role of SOF in conflict. Better understanding leads to better SOF-CF integration.

In an unpublished article relating to SOF related PME titled “Special Operations: An Uneasy Footing in Army Profession Military Education,” the author discusses the current state of CF special operations PME. He goes on to discuss the implications of lack of such PME after combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq no longer provide operational requirements for higher levels of SOF-CF interaction. This article advocates better SOF oriented PME to the CF.

The importance of integration of SOF and CF, the prominence of the concept in strategic writing, and the fact that integration has occurred for the last decade of population-centric warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq has led to a massive amount of material focused on solving the SOF-CF integration problem. This material falls into two categories. The first category is that information which is so specific and tied to the

current friendly, enemy, and strategic situation that the information found in the report or article is only good for those specific set of conditions. Articles in this category then had to be recent and relevant to the current situation. The second category is those reports or articles which provide relevant information regardless of the strategic situation, threat situation, or friendly situation. The following articles and reports fall in the first category and will remain relevant as long as DoD continues to look to develop an integrated and interdependent SOF-CF force capable of winning in population-centric warfare.

“SOF Integration with Conventional Forces: A Doctrine Gap?” is a recent School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) monograph studying the integration of SOF and CF that uses two case studies, Operation Anaconda and operations in northern Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, to determine if inadequate doctrine was the reason for friction between the two types of forces when they worked together. A key useful aspect of this monograph is how it looks at the impact of command and control structures on tactical level operations. This monograph emphasized that “unity of command does not equal unity of effort” (Stroud 2012, 37). In developing a model for tactical level integration-interdependence of SOF and CF, this thesis addresses how command and control will work when SOF and CF are integrated.

The article, “Unity of Command Should Guide SOF and GPF Integration,” published January 2013, provides further focused analysis of a way ahead for tactical level integration of SOF and CF. Key point here is that at the tactical level unity of command between SOF and CF will align each forces effort to accomplish the commander’s intent and end state (Stroud 2013, 23). The author puts forward two concepts to achieve unity of command between SOF and CF. This article is extremely

useful because it provides a starting point for recommendations to enhance effectiveness of SOF-CF integration during tactical operations.

This analysis for this thesis is focused on the tactical level integration of SOF and CF. Most of the literature focused on operational level rather than tactical level SOF-CF interdependence. Narrowing the focus to the tactical level is important because most current literature on the topic is particularly relevant given current operations in Afghanistan. Also, the literature indicates that tactical level interdependence is more difficult to achieve than operational level interdependence. The systems necessary to enable interdependence at the tactical level will enhance the more mature systems currently in place to enable interdependence at the operational level.

In order to tie the topic of this thesis into current operations and help develop findings and conclusions, a logical approach is to look to examples of current effective SOF-CF tactical integration and interdependence. The VSO program is the ideal lens through which to examine SOF-CF integration and interdependence at the tactical level. After over a decade of population-centric conflict and adaptation across the force, the VSO program emerged in Afghanistan as the solution for separating insurgents from the population and then connecting that population to the GIROA (Connett and Cassidy 2011, 24). Where the broad concept of VSO informs how the U.S. may employ forces against an adversary in future population-centric conflicts, the actual implementation of the VSO programs also illustrates the reality of the challenges of developing tactical level integration and interdependence.

The article, “Integrating Village Stability Operations into Conventional Force Battlespace,” provides a conventional perspective of SOF-CF integration during VSO

operations. The fact that the article focuses on VSO operations is important because VSO operations are different than most SOF-CF integrated operations. The author summarizes the key difference being that VSO required a SOF unit to operate for an extended amount of time in close proximity to the CF element operating in the same battlespace (Tharp 2013, 20). However, VSO remains relevant even after coalition forces withdraw conventional combat forces from the region. How the coalition executes VSO operations after this withdraw will provide lessons for execution of similar population centric efforts in the future. Current VSO operations look remarkably similar aspects of the concept of engagement as articulated in strategic guidance. Execution of engagement strategies could benefit from tactical level lessons provided by VSO. Examining how unity of effort and integration is achieved during VSO operations supports the findings of this thesis.

Several other VSO specific articles provided insight into the innovations the Army made in developing the VSO program and provided lessons learned. The article, “The Fight for the Village” provides perspective on the level of deep cultural understanding associated with conducting VSO. The article, “The Nuts and Bolts of Village Stability Operations” provided a broad understanding of the goals and execution of VSO. The Afghan Local Police (ALP) initiative, and its connection to the VSO program is detailed in the article, “Taking a Stand: VSO and the Afghan Local Police.” In this article the author discusses how the ALP program works in line with the historic way in which rural Afghans traditionally provided village security. To understand how VSO supports the overall International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) counterinsurgency campaign, the article, “Village Stability Operations: More than Just Village Defense”

describes the method which the VSO teams are attempting to connect stabilized villages with GIRoA.

In terms of literature that specifically dealt with the incorporation of CF into the VSO effort, two articles do a good job discussing specific innovations and lessons learned. In the article, “Transforming the Conflict in Afghanistan” the author provides a useful background into VSO and discusses the benefits of SOF-CF interdependence to the overall VSO and analysis of the way ahead in terms of DOTMILPF. Tactical level detail of the innovations involved with interdependence between SOF and CF is discussed in the article, “Innovation in Integration: Task Force Iron Ranger and Village Stability Operations in Afghanistan 2010-11.” The author has solid advice for ways in which to improve tactical level interdependence in future tactical level operations.

The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) provides an in depth look at lessons learned in the *Village Stability Operations SOF Lessons Learned: VSO Operations in Afghanistan interview with LTC David S. Mann*. This interview provides excellent background information and perspective to this thesis by providing a SOF centric look at the development of the VSO program, the methodology and implementation of VSO in Afghanistan, and lessons learned. Based on national level strategic guidance and anticipated application of U.S. forces in future population-centric conflict, a program similar to VSO may be very effective in other areas of the world that are difficult to govern. Future SOF-CF integration and interdependence may increase the capability of U.S. forces to employ the VSO template to deny insurgents sanctuary in areas difficult to govern will apply in other regions of the world where U.S. forces may be employed.

Along with the methodology template that the VSO program demonstrates, the tactical level execution of the VSO program with integrated and interdependent SOF and CF provide insights to this thesis. Lessons learned are captured in the report *Special Operations Forces and Conventional Forces Integration: Lessons Learned in Village Stability Operations*. This document contained few surprises. On the SOF side, there was an expressed desire that the CF forces (in this case squads assigned to the SOF teams conducting VSO) be of a more mature quality and conform to established and validated SOF SOPs for conducting VSO (Robins 2012, 5). On the CF side there was an expressed desire for more specialized training to execute VSO and inclusion of subject matter experts at the BN staff level to synchronize activity in which a conventional battalion has little expertise (Robins 2012, 7). This information links the tactical level execution of CF and SOF integration for VSO operations to broader themes highlighted by the other literature reviewed for this thesis. For example, a SO WfF provides a doctrinal basis for establishing a SOF cell in a conventional unit, which in turn creates an organic capability within a BDE or BN to better integrate with SOF elements. Solving the problem of institutionalizing SOF-CF integration at the tactical level will enable a more adaptable force that can more effectively fight population-centric conflicts.

The scope of research material to cover for this thesis is significant because of the strategic and institutional implications of implementing SOF-CF interdependence and integration. Though challenging because of the volume of material, the research benefited due to quality. A decade of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan offers a multitude of well documented instances of real life SOF and CF interaction. That interaction, in turn, generated relevant lessons learned. At the strategic and institutional level, thinkers in the

Army and elsewhere have invested a tremendous amount of time in assessing the nature of current and future threats resulting in updated doctrine and a vision for future force employment. Having identified enhanced SOF-CF interdependence and integration as essential to building a more adaptable and effective force to prepare that force to meet the future threat, several studies and reports exist that look into different aspects and implications of enhancing SOF-CF interdependence and integration. Therefore, the real challenge for this thesis is to find the gaps in knowledge and build a thesis that provides a meaningful contribution to the growing body of research into SOF-CF interdependence and integration.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the innovations and adaptations the Army made to enable execution of the VSO program and determine what the Army can do to enhance interdependence between SOF and CF at the tactical level during population-centric or irregular warfare. In order to answer the primary research question, qualitative analysis of primary, secondary and tertiary source materials were used. The source material fell into three broad categories; current Joint and Army doctrine, articles and reports relevant to the thesis, and interviews with subject matter experts to gain further insight into ideas and concepts found in research documents. As research progressed into answering the primary research question, several key secondary questions emerged.

What does the term interdependence mean and how does interdependence apply to SOF-CF interaction? Tactical interaction of SOF and CF is not a new topic. Early in the research of the primary question, various publications used several terms interchangeably to describe SOF-CF interaction. The three most common terms used were “integration,” “interoperability,” and “interdependence.” Joint doctrine provided a baseline definition for each item. Of the three terms, “interdependence” emerged as the best way to describe the effect strategic thinkers were attempting to achieve by combining the actions of SOF and CF. Additionally, in order for “interdependence” to work, “integration” and “interoperability” must first be achieved between the separate forces to the varying degrees necessary to enable mission execution. Furthermore, where “interoperability” and “integration” refer to removing physical or organizationally generated barriers that impede interaction between the two forces (e.g. getting radios to

work together or establishing a common headquarters for each force at the lowest possible level or establishing efficient C2 relationships), “interdependence” refers to the result of the blending of capabilities and how the forces interact. Understanding the intent behind using the term interdependence explains the strategic and institutional vision for an adaptive and agile force capable of winning our nation’s land battles in the human domain.

The next logical question to answer is how or why the Army is attempting to enhance interdependence between SOF and CF. The original idea for the primary research question for this thesis resulted from listening to how policy makers and defense officials described the growing role of special operations in exercising the military instrument of U.S. national power and then trying to determine how the vision for future SOF employment would affect conventional force employment. The concept of improving the interdependence of SOF and CF emerged during early research into doctrinal readings and reports. Enhancing interdependence between SOF and CF is one concept to improve the overall adaptability of U.S. Armed Forces. The focus of research then shifted from looking into Joint interdependence to focus specifically Army CF-SOF interdependence.

Army CF-SOF interdependence became the primary focus for research for a couple of reasons. First, Army SOF and CF are most familiar to the author of the thesis. Secondly, the U.S. Army has a preponderance of both SOF and CF ground units conducting operations in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Because most recent instances of SOF-CF interaction involved Army personnel, finding research material to answer the primary and secondary research

questions was much easier. Finally, when researching the progress made to institutionalize SOF-CF interdependence, the effort the Army has made provided the most insight into why and how the Armed Forces are implementing change.

Research then shifted to determining what capabilities have demonstrated effectiveness in population-centric warfare and where have these successes occurred. Given that, as articulated by strategic guidance previously noted in this thesis, the Army must develop a more adaptable force to enable success in population-centric warfare, and that all future conflicts would entail military engagement in the human domain to some degree, it became important to identify a case study that could provide insight into the capabilities of interdependent SOF-CFs. Research into SOF and CF interaction over the course of the last decade of conflict that involved large numbers of SOF and CF in two theaters of war yielded many examples of interaction appropriate for this study. However, as the conflicts progressed over time in each theater, a trend emerged. The same lessons learned that informed the development of new population-centric warfare techniques tactics and procedures also contributed to an understanding of emerging threats to our nation and informed how the Army engaged in OIF and OEF. The Army continually adapted how it employed SOF and CF in each theater. Therefore, the most recent application of SOF-CF interaction is the most relevant to the thesis since the most recent model of interaction is the model that will inform the next iteration of DOTMLPF modification in the Army. Based on interviews with SMEs and review of recent relevant publications, the current VSO program in Afghanistan offered the best example of recent tactical level interdependence and integration. Research then focused on determining

what new capabilities interdependence of SOF and CF enabled by examining what capabilities of an integrated SOF-CF element enabled mission accomplishment.

Having established why and how the Army sought to enhance interdependence, the next step was to try to determine the likelihood of a future deployment of an interdependent SOF-CF force. Answering this question entails determining through research what potential threats the U.S. government and the DoD have determined that U.S. military forces must be capable of defeating. Strategically, this threat was fairly easy to ascertain. Multiple doctrinal and policy documents identify irregular, hybrid, and transnational threats to the U.S. and world stability. An interdependent SOF-CF force is ideally suited to conduct operations in the human domain, such as counter insurgency or other population-centric irregular warfare scenarios. Additionally, due to the new nature of warfare based on globalization and the potential for non-state actors to pose transnational threats, even future conventional conflict will be influence significantly by the human domain. Research then focused on determining how likely future conflicts will have a population oriented aspect.

SOF or an interdependent and integrated SOF-CF force is ideally suited for employment during population-centric warfare. So, the next question to consider is if a SOF-CF interdependent force relevant beyond just population-centric warfare. Again, research into this question is tied to determining future threats to the U.S. and world stability. Study of strategic assessments of the future threat showed that the U.S. has a good concept of the nature of the future threat (asymmetric, transnational, irregular, hybrid) but does not have a good concept of specific future threats beyond those the U.S. faces now. In order to examine the utility of interdependent SOF-CF forces beyond

population-centric conflict, we must measure such a force's capabilities against a threat that is not tied to population. Therefore, research turned to look at how the Army envisioned succeeding in sustained land operations. For this research, examining the institutional Army concept for employment in unified land operations is useful.

The final key question research into this topic sought to answer is what steps can the Army take to further institutionalize SOF-CF interdependence at the tactical level? Research into this question began with attempting to determine what the Army is already doing to institutionalize SOF-CF interdependence and then proceeded to attempt to find gaps. Two aspects of institutionalization emerged; the top-down process and the bottom-up process. The top-down process refers to the formal process at national and Army level that traditionally have implemented change within the Army. The bottom-up process refers to adaptations and ad-hoc arrangements developed at the tactical level of the Army to address immediate issues and problems in mission accomplishment. Research indicates that the top-down process is mature and ongoing toward further institutionalization, while the bottom-up process remains somewhat disjointed. Therefore, research shifted to determining what was not working at the tactical level and then to identify what further steps were necessary at institutional levels to further enhance tactical interdependence.

There are strengths and weaknesses in the research methodology. This research topic is continually evolving and adapting as CF and SOF work together to defeat the enemy in current population-centric battlefields around the world. Facts and assumptions established today may not be valid tomorrow. The strengths of this research methodology emerge from those aspects of the institutional Army that change very little or change slowly. The weaknesses of this research methodology stem from those aspects of the

operational Army that change rapidly. Conclusions and recommendations should be relevant regardless of changes in enemy, time, place, or force because they address the institutional effort as opposed to how the Army happens to be fighting today.

Research for this thesis benefitted from having updated strategic guidance and doctrine to establish a baseline for the vision the Army has for an interdependent SOF-CF force and the threat that force will face. A great deal of thought and activity has been invested by the Army into forming the right vision for the future of the force. Up to date doctrine and strategic guidance allowed for easy and accurate answers to the research questions oriented around understanding strategic necessity and intent of SOF-CF interdependence. Furthermore, in those areas of DOTMLPF where aspects of change are still required, several efforts continue to form the institutional foundation necessary to realize the envisioned change. For example, the introduction of an additional war fighting function to ensure staff at all levels adequately plan and resource human domain engagements for all types of forces is still a work in progress.

On the other hand, the rapidly evolving nature of today's population-centric threat and the measures the operational forces employs to counter that threat present a challenge to ensuring the findings of this research are accurate and relevant. An agile force adapts quicker than the parent organization of that force. Without direct communication with leaders conducting operations in theater today, the research runs the risk of becoming outdated before it is published. However, sometimes information from the battlefield can be too specific and could introduce bias into this report. To mitigate this, research for this report relied on CALL reports to capture broader trends and best practices applicable to answering the research questions.

This study is an effort to understand how and why the Army is changing and to develop further recommendations to assist with the change. Understanding the vision for this change required a thorough understanding of current strategic guidance and the organizational steps taken to implement change. But tactical and operational experience shapes strategic vision. Today U.S. Army forces are engaged in population-centric warfare as an interdependent SOF-CF force. This resulted from operational and tactical level leaders adapting institutional Army tools with the right capabilities to win a population-centric fight. Therefore, to fully understand what the institutional army must do to build the kind of agile force required for future success in population-centric conflict, understanding how tactical level interdependence evolved and what makes tactical lever interdependence is essential.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

SOF-CF interdependence is an important part of the institutional Army's plan to develop and operationally adaptive force to fight and win against future threats to U.S. interests in the current operating environment (COE). The Global War on Terror demonstrated that SOF-CF interdependence was essential for all phases of conflict and, as Army capabilities in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism grew, interaction between SOF and CF evolved to tactical level SOF-CF interdependence demonstrated by the VSO currently ongoing in Afghanistan. As the end product of multiple iterations of SOF-CF interaction to succeed against population-centric threats in Iraq and Afghanistan, VSO offers the best example of tactical level interdependence. More importantly, however, examining how the Army implemented VSO provides relevant insights into what the institutional Army must be able to do to effectively build a future force that is operationally adaptive. Beyond merely providing lessons learned on how SOF and CF interact in a tactical environment, the VSO program provides lessons learned for what capabilities the institutional Army must possess in the future.

The institutional Army seeks to build a force capable of operational adaptability in order to provide decisive land power on behalf of U.S. interests (Department of the Army 2012b, 11). SOF-CF interdependence is a key component of this vision. Enhanced SOF-CF interdependence addresses the challenges introduced by the human aspects of conflict and war. As the institutional Army trains, educates, and equips the future force, capability in the human domain will be essential and SOF-CF interdependence will

leverage SOF capabilities to inculcate key skills across the conventional force (Sacolick and Grigsby 2012, 39).

Research indicates that the Army faces three key challenges as it builds a force capable of providing decisive land power in current and future battlefields. First, the COE is complex and the Army will require a force capable of fighting and winning in such an environment. Secondly, though the current force has a wide variety of capabilities developed over the course of the last ten years of conflict, it is not postured to use those capabilities to their fullest potential and must make institutional changes in order to build an operationally adaptive force. Finally, the resources to transform the Army are extremely limited and Army leadership will have to carefully determine in which aspects of Army DOTMILPF to invest.

Only doctrine specific to SOF provides more than a couple of sentences specifically discussing SOF-CF interdependence, even though strategic guidance based on lessons from a decade of conflict point to SOF-CF interdependence as a key enabler for future operational adaptability. Publications dealing with conventional force operations only allude to the need to interact with outside services and agencies, especially when conducting stability operations.

That SOF Doctrine, in the form of ADRP 3-05, provides an overview of SOF characteristics and capabilities and detailed information with respect to SOF-CF interdependence. The guiding principle is that ARSOF provides a comprehensive capability at the strategic level to conduct operations designed to prevent or prevail in war (Department of the Army 2012e, 1-1). In terms of interdependence, SOF and CF may rely on each other's capabilities to maximize the complementary and reinforcing effects

of both (Department of the Army 2012e, 1-15). SOF doctrine addresses in particular the command relationship found when SOF and CF operate together. Though a Joint Force Commander (JFC) can choose to designate a SOF unit subordinate to a conventional unit, the document advocates maintaining a centralized, responsive, and unambiguous SOF command and control structure. Such a structure enables the SOF commander to organize and employ forces in the best way to satisfy both the requirements of the JFC commander and the requirements of other supported commanders (Department of the Army 2012e, 1-16). Command and control relationships are very important to implementation of interdependence between SOF and CF. The cleaner the lines of command and control, the more effective the interdependent force. A key lesson learned from VSO operations is that, for the program to work, the force was integrated to the tactical level with unity of command and purpose.

Though doctrine focused on conventional operations provides no specific impediments to implementation of SOF-CF interdependence, a few key points arose from the review of this doctrine that show it is more focused on how CF should operate during phase 3 and phase 4 with less guidance specific for the other phases of operations. For starters, ADRP 3-0 advocates that decisive action is an inherently conventional task. Therefore the doctrine contained within ADRP 3-0 is focused on how CF should operate within the context of decisive action in a strategic environment. There is no specific discussion of how to employ or interact with SOF forces in this publication. Similarly, ADRP 3-90, which is focused on conventional CAM tasks, discusses interdependence in the context of joint operations. No mention of SOF capabilities are addressed within this publication except with respect to personnel recovery. The takeaway with respect to

interdependence for a tactical commander is that his force will operate as a member of an interdependent joint force that will rely on other Service's capabilities (Department of the Army 2012g, 2-1). This provides insight into how the Army expects a conventional commander to doctrinally view the relationship between SOF and his formation. If SOF is defined as another service, a tactical commander will look at a SOF force in his area of operation (AO) as an enabler for his effort.

Moving away from CAM to WAS, ADRP 3-07 broadens the doctrinal approach to operations. This change in focus is significant because inclusion of actors outside of the military prevent the publication from having a purely tactical focus; instead focusing on capabilities that are not necessarily organic to conventional Army formations. ADRP 3-07 emphasizes that capabilities across the joint force must be employed in order accomplish the tasks associated with conducting stability operations (Department of the Army 2012f, 2-1). ADRP 3-07 also provides a detailed description of FID and discusses how FID relates to SFA. FID is identified in this publication as a SOF mission that CF may support through SFA. SFA are those activities where DoD forces organize, train, equip, rebuild, build, and advise a partner nations security forces (Department of the Army 2012f, 3-3).

Looking deeper into FID, JP 3-22 notes that SOF has a significant role in FID operations and that SOF commanders must coordinate with other commanders within a combatant command to manage operations effectively in support of FID. Those operations include joint and multinational exercises, mobile training teams, integration of SOF with CF, and other operations (Department of Defense 2010b, III-9). In terms of this thesis, SOF-CF interdependence during FID operations limits the scope of examining

how interdependence can be enhanced. However, the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts produced a number of examples of SOF-CF integration, particularly with respect to the SFA mission conventional forces assumed as the conflicts progressed. Therefore, this document provides a good doctrinal framework to examine SOF-CF integration which may help translate to broader SOF-CF interdependence beyond FID.

Research also underscores the importance of the human aspects of conflict and war in present and future conflicts. The concepts of the human domain and the 7th WfF are especially interesting. For the Army to operate effectively in future population-centric conflicts, the force employed must fully understand the environment, including an intimate knowledge of the history, culture, and society of the population (Chairman 2012a, 4). The Army's investment in SOF, a force which is especially adept at operating by, with, and through, other indigenous peoples, equates to investment in the Army's capability to operate in the human domain. It is not realistic to attempt to build the same level of capability across the entire Army. Therefore, interdependence is a means to broaden SOF capability and enable CF effectives in the human domain, particularly at appropriate tactical levels. Since the 7th WfF is intended to enable a commander to operate in and shape populations and actors in his environment, the opportunity exists for the Army to provide further doctrinal basis for SOF-CF interdependence.

The Army is attempting to build an operationally adaptive force able to, among other things, understand the operational environment more thoroughly, transition between phases of operations more efficiently, adapt faster, and better integrate SOF and conventional forces (Chairman 2012a, 2). All of these aspects of transformation are connected to increasing capability while conducting operations during population-centric

warfare. SOF has the skills to influence a population, CF have the capability and resources to close with and destroy the enemy. Each force plays a role in providing the Army options for delivering decisive force to the land and human domains to “prevent, shape, and win” our nations wars.

The Army has a relevant doctrinal framework that can support further implementation of SOF-CF interdependence but more work must be done. Only SOF doctrine offers any solutions for how to actually execute interdependence. Conventional doctrine is right to remain focused on providing guidance on how to execute a conventional fight, but more work should be done to give commanders the tools to organize and implement systems that are relevant in today’s complex operational environment. In order for doctrine to improve, the 7th WfF and incorporation of the human domain should be considered.

The Army has clearly articulated a need for SOF-CF interdependence and integration at the tactical level. To achieve operational adaptability in the face of the Army’s current transformational challenges, the Army endeavors to develop a force capable of preventing conflict, shaping the operational environment, and winning the Nation’s wars (Department of the Army 2012b, 11). Interdependence is important to achieving the capability to the “prevent, shape, win” concept because it enhances the effectiveness of long-term shaping operations and improves execution of all missions by combining the capabilities inherent in each force.

Experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, both heavily population influenced operations, demonstrated that the closer each force operated, the better the results. If greater interdependence is tied to better effectiveness in the land domain because SOF-

CF interdependence allows land forces to fully account for human aspects of conflict and war, and operating decisively in the land domain while fully accounting for the human aspects of conflict and war enables greater operational adaptability, then interdependence of SOF and CF is a key component of achieving the institutional Army's vision for the future force. Enhancing SOF-CF interdependence will enable the Army to keep and enhance its ability to operate in population-centric conflicts using lessons learned from the last decade of conflict.

An operationally adaptive Army must be able to implement SOF-CF interdependence effectively. Implementation of the SOF-CF interdependence, realized at the tactical level in the VSO program, demonstrates that Army can operate successfully with the capabilities it already possesses as long as the Army first accurately determines what must be done to defeat the enemy and makes the "ad hoc" adjustments to the force necessary to accomplish the mission.

The VSO Program offers several observations that in turn inform planners about how to best tactically integrate SOF and CF to form an interdependent force capable of winning in a population-centric conflict (Robins 2012, 2). The most interesting aspect of the VSO program, though, is not the program itself, but rather what the implementation of the program demonstrates about the ability of the Army to be operationally adaptive. The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan presented the Army with challenges that it could not overcome without interdependent capabilities of the armed services and the interagency at the operational level and interdependent capabilities of SOF and CF at the tactical level. It took nearly a decade before the Army realized the fruits of building interdependence at operational and tactical levels to the point where it was effective.

The VSO program includes several institutional innovations that provide insight into to Army operational adaptability. First, the campaign strategy for success in Afghanistan shifted from enemy to population-centric (L'Etoile 2012, 5). This is an innovation because it implies that the Army recognized that it did not necessarily have the right tools to conduct population-centric warfare in Afghanistan. The old adage, “when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail” applies when conducting enemy centric operations in a population-centric environment. SOF and CF elements, adept at targeting enemy networks and winning tactical engagements could not make an impact at the operational level if the population remained exposed to Taliban influence (L'Etoile, 7). Shifting the priority of tactical level effort from targeting the enemy to protecting and providing for the population opened the door for considering what the population required in order to support the government of Afghanistan. This, in turn, brought the historic relationship between the government of Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan into proper perspective (Mann 2012, Part 1). With that perspective, the Army determined a different approach to connecting the people of Afghanistan with their government was necessary.

Developing a new approach to connect the government to the people led to the second key innovation which is to apply a bottom-up approach to providing stability (Mann 2012, Part 1). A top-down approach to developing governance is the typical way to approach enhancing host nation security and governance, such as in Japan after World War II or Iraq after 2003 (Connett and Cassidy 2011, 24). This approach did not work well in Afghanistan where power is diffuse. The heart of why the VSO program is working in Afghanistan is that the program recognizes that rural Afghan villages never

had a strong cultural or historical connection to the Afghan central government. Therefore, to successfully connect the rural population to the Afghan government and create an environment hostile to the enemy, the coalition had to put a force capable of understanding subtle cultural nuances in as many villages as possible. SOF is the force of choice to implement the bottom-up approach, and in fact the first instances of VSO implementation were conducted by pure SOF elements. However, to implement the VSO program to the extent necessary to make a difference in the conflict, SOF had to be able to extend beyond where SOF was organically capable of operating. This led to the third institutional innovation.

The final key innovation by the Army was, after pilot VSO programs proved successful, the blending of CF and SOF elements to form interdependent teams in order to meet the demand for SOF capabilities to the scale necessary to enable the VSO program to have an effect across Afghanistan (Robins 2012, 2). Since development of host nation governance and security lines of operation typically reside at the operational level, conventional force tactical battle space owners (BSOs) do not inherently possess the skills necessary to implement host nation development along those lines. Yet in Afghanistan BSOs have intimate access to the population by virtue of sheer numbers and dispersion across the whole of the country. SOF forces, which possess high levels of skill with respect to understanding culture and working with indigenous peoples, are too few to embed into the population to the levels required to have an effect across the country. Therefore, the Army did something it had never done before, it intricately and successfully integrated SOF and CF at the tactical level (Robins, O'Hearn, and Sessoms 2012, 2).

Implementation of the VSO program provides three key lessons for employment of interdependent forces in future population-centric conflicts. First, culture and history can be decisive. Secondly, the institutional Army has the necessary expertise and scale of forces to successfully conduct population-centric warfare at the tactical level if it can assess culture and history of the operating environment correctly and then assemble the right interdependent force based on that assessment. Finally, the Army must be capable of rapidly and accurately assessing the environment and then forming the appropriate interdependent force. The VSO program is an example of the Army applying operationally adaptive principles to the battlefield.

To build an operationally adaptive force capable of effective operations in a foreign environment, the Army must first understand the operational environment. In population-centric warfare this is even more important because the forces employed need to understand the population just as they do the enemy. This is why culture and history of a population can be decisive (Mann 2012, part 5). The VSO program could not work without an intimate understanding, at the tactical level, of the population in which each team embeds. Broad generalizations of culture, ethno-centric tensions, clan and tribal characteristics, etc. are not enough to allow a team at the tactical level to connect with a rural population. Without the connection, it is not possible to set conditions where the population will be receptive to top-down initiatives. In the VSO program, embedding with the population is decisive because embedding provides the necessary level of fidelity with respect to the cultural and historical requirements that must be satisfied for the population to connect top-down government programs and initiatives. To successfully influence any population, a truly operationally adaptive Army must embed into the

population to the extent necessary to gain a decisive level of cultural and historical information about the population the Army seeks to influence. Only after gaining that connection to the population and an a detailed understanding of what makes that particular piece of the land and human domain battlefield tick can the Army begin to effectively influence the population.

VSO demonstrates that the institutional Army can adapt force structure to provide capabilities that meet operational requirements without having to alter the institutional Army itself. The integrated SOF-CF teams currently conducting VSO in Afghanistan do not exist organically in the institutional Army. However, the Army assigned infantry battalions OPCON to Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) in order to provide manpower for expansion of the VSO program. Further adaptation occurred when one of the conventional battalions was designated as a Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) to which all SOF conducting VSO in Regional Command (RC)-North answered (Robins 2012, 3). The bottom line here is that it was not necessary to drastically alter several institutional components of the Army in order to meet an operational requirement. Operational adaptability was achieved and is achievable by the Army as it is structured today. To enable future operational adaptability, the Army must take measures to insure non-standard, adaptive force alignment to create non-standard capabilities is easier and quicker to accomplish in the future.

In order to be successful in future population-centric conflicts, the U.S. Army must rapidly recognize decisive tactical level cultural and historical context and then apply that knowledge to quickly generate and employ a tactical level interdependent

force. The Army took too long to implement the VSO program. The coherent bottom-up strategy to connect Afghan governance and security to the population which ultimately resulted in the VSO program did not begin until after over eight years U.S. attempts at a top-down approach (Mann 2012, Part 1). The last decade of conflict was characterized by an abundance of resources, particularly time and money, pouring into the U.S. military in order to win in Iraq and Afghanistan. Future population-centric conflicts will have limited time and money applied to them (Department of the Army 2012b, 5). The intent behind creating an operationally adaptive force is to bring capabilities to the battlefield faster than the enemy can evolve to defeat the capabilities. Institutional inertia is the biggest threat to building the operational adaptability which will be required for future population-centric conflicts.

It is worth noting here that the Army is currently working to set conditions that will facilitate a better operational adaptability. One solution the Army is currently implementing is to regionally align Army forces. The ACC states, “to improve the Army’s ability to prevent, shape, and win, the Army aligns its forces regionally to deliver conventional and special operations forces capabilities in support of combatant command requirements” (Department of the Army 2012b,16). As a supporting idea to the Army’s central idea to build operational adaptability into the force, the regional alignment of forces offers an excellent opportunity for the Army to enhance SOF and CF interdependence. Regional alignment offers conventional forces an opportunity to flatten the learning curve associated with conducting operations where the languages, cultures, geography, and militaries of countries play a key role in the outcome of a conflict (Department of the Army 2010, 25). By providing the conventional force with a focus for

learning about the human domain in a given AO, regional alignment will reduce the gap in human domain capabilities between SOF and CF. Finally, in preparing for contingency or conflict and stabilization operations in a specific region, SOF and CF planners can begin to tailor plans for the relationships, task organization, and execution of interdependent SOF-CF integrated missions. These plans would, in turn, inform training events which could be used to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of SOF-CF integrated operations. These operationally and regionally informed event specific training events could also be used to build rapport between SOF and CF who share regional alignment. Incidentally, since units that habitually work together have better levels of trust, cohesion, and combat effectiveness, nesting the regional alignment of CF with SOF regional alignment would enhance the supporting concept of enhancing unit cohesion (Department of the Army 2010, 20).

As the culmination of a decade of lessons learned about how to construct and employ the right tools to succeed in population-centric conflict, the VSO program offers critical lessons that the institutional Army must use to build the future operationally adaptive force. Without a specific threat against which to develop innovative solutions, such as securing rural Afghan villages and then connecting them to the Afghan central government, the Army may not consider maintaining the ability to create tactically interdependent forces as important as preserving conventional force structure or other traditional Army institutions. The lesson of how the Army developed the capability to effectively influence individual Afghan villagers is critical to informing how it will build an operationally adaptive force for future population-centric conflicts. The VSO lesson is

important and the institutional Army should take steps to enable better, faster SOF and CF interdependence at the tactical level in the future.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By building on the lessons from implementation of the VSO program, the Institutional Army can take several steps to improve interdependence between SOF and CF, ultimately improving the overall operational adaptability of force. An adaptive force is the Army's answer to the challenges of today's operating environment which is characterized by complex threats, interconnected and competing populations and states, and fewer resources.

Research into the tactical interdependence currently employed to enable implementation of the VSO program across Afghanistan provided several insights into why tactical interdependence of SOF and CF is important to the future operational adaptability of the Army. In order for the Army to operate in an adaptive way, the Army must nurture and preserve the processes that enable the Army to be tactically effective in the human domain. SOF is the key to effectiveness in the human domain and interdependence is the key to broadening the scale and impact of SOF capabilities. Furthermore, building institutional systems to support SOF-CF interdependence will build SOF-like capabilities across the conventional force, leading to better conventional force capabilities in the human domain. The lessons of VSO provide great insight into what it will take to build an operationally adaptive force.

Research indicated that the human domain will play a key role in resolving future conflicts in line with U.S. national interests. SOF/CF tactical interdependence was necessary to gain the tactical effectiveness required for effective VSO operations. Currently, the focus for Army CF development and training is to promote effectiveness in

CAM, which translates to high effectiveness in phase 3 and 4 operations. This type of organization is essential to enable U.S. land forces to gain the initiative and dominate a battlefield. However, experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has shown that winning the conventional fight is only the first step. In today's COE, winning the peace during stability operations will require a force that can transition and organize appropriately to provide the right capabilities to influence the population during population-centric conflict.

The development of the VSO program provides evidence of the importance of operational adaptability to population-centric conflict. The Army recognized it needed to adapt traditional SOF and CF formations in order to operate effectively with a population-centric strategy in Afghanistan. The complexity that the human domain introduces into the battlefield insures that in future theaters the Army will have to adapt in different ways on other battlefields in order to be effective. As long as the human domain is a factor in conflict, the Army will have to maintain operational adaptability.

A key point that emerged from the research is that for interdependence to be effective in the human domain, it has to occur at the tactical level. The Army innovated meaningfully when it established unity of command and unity of effort to enable interdependent teams at the tactical level to execute VSO. This change was necessary in order to get the right expertise into as many rural Afghan villages as possible to have an impact on governance and security development across Afghanistan. Operating effectively in the human domain in future theaters will require the same level of expertise applied at the tactical level. If the expertise is required to the same scale as in

Afghanistan, then the capability to develop interdependence at the tactical level must exist.

With respect to expertise in the human domain, research indicated that SOF is the force of choice within the Army to conduct operations at the tactical level in the human domain. Within limits, conventional forces are capable of operating within the human domain. However, devoting the time and resources to developing conventional force capability to match that of SOF would effectively compromise conventional force capability to conduct traditional conventional operations. It would undercut the primary tasks where CF excel, have excessive cost, and with no corresponding gain.

SOF, on the other hand, is built to be effective by, with, and through indigenous populations. Because of this, SOF can easily elevate cultural and historical understanding of the population in an operating environment in order to execute future operations similar to VSO. This conclusion seems obvious, but over the last ten years of conflict the division between what each force should be capable of doing has blurred. For SOF, special warfare capabilities took a back seat to surgical strike capability. For conventional forces, battle drills and basic tactics took a back seat to non-standard requirements such as conducting key leader engagements or conducting security force assistance. An operationally adaptive force will require SOF and CF to each be able to operate as masters of their traditional roles in the Army. In the human domain, SOF is the superior force. How then to use that superiority to enhance CF capability without reducing SOF's efficiency?

Research in the operational adaptability demonstrated by the VSO program indicates that interdependence between SOF and CF will be an operationally adaptive

future force. Operational adaptability depends on the Army maintaining a wide range of capabilities in order to deter, shape, and win regardless of the enemy, geographic challenges, or political limits. Ranging from conventional force on force to stability operations in the human domain, the Army will require forces that can succeed against the enemy faster than the enemy can adapt. The successful interdependent SOF/CF operations in Afghanistan demonstrate that this concept works..

So, the question remains, what can the Army do to enhance interdependence between SOF and CF, and by extension, operational adaptability? The first step is to insure that each element is the master of their traditional roles in the Army. Second, the Army should take steps to institutionalize the concept of the human domain in order ensure that commanders at all levels develop systems to better understand and better leverage human factors in their AOs faster. Finally, though SOF and CF have very different cultures because of the nature of each force and the missions each force executes, the Army should develop methods of training and educating leaders from the tactical level up in order to make tactical level interdependence between SOF and CF more of a norm rather than a necessary innovation. These recommendations, developed together and inculcated across the force, will provide a combined effect that enable innovative application of interdependence between SOF and CF to bring the right capabilities to the battlefield faster than the enemy can adapt.

It seems counterintuitive to this thesis that the starting point for better SOF-CF interdependence is to insure that each force is the expert at their respective mission sets since interdependence is about bringing the forces together. However, the key to interdependence is that each force brings a capability to the battlefield that the other force

lacks. Interdependence does not work if the forces are not capable, or are only marginally capable. To that end, the Army seems to be on the right track with efforts such as the Decisive Action Training Events (DATE) rotations at the National Training Center that focus on rebuilding core conventional force skills in CAM that have eroded over the last decade. The potential challenge to operational adaptability here is if the training scenarios become overly complex or focus on technical aspects to the point of disregarding those areas where the human domain becomes a force multiplier. The regrettable tendency then is for CF commanders to stay in their lanes, and be unable to see the many advantages that result from interdependence.

The human domain has more impact on operations than ever before in history and the Army should take steps to reflect this reality of the battlefield in doctrine and practice. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the enemy demonstrated the capability to leverage the human domain faster than coalition forces could adapt. The Army needs to build systems to account for the human domain better. Formalizing the concept of the human domain into doctrine will set conditions for better analysis and planning to account for the human aspects of conflict and war in land force operations. The 7th WfF, or SO WfF, should also be included in doctrine because it will provide a concrete connection between tactical CF commanders and the application of a wide range of capabilities in the human domain.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the solution to providing CF commanders with the knowledge and expertise they required to leverage SOF capabilities in their AOs was extensive use of liaisons. Though the arrangement was effective, having an organic SO expert on CF staff would reduce manpower requirements for SOF elements and the SO

expert would be familiar with the culture and systems of the CF staff long before the deployment. The biggest challenge here is actually manning CF staffs across the Army with SO experts. USSOCOM is the first place to look for SO experts who may appreciate an opportunity to stabilize at one post and rotate between ARSOF groups and Army brigades which are co-located. CF SO officer capability can also be promoted through specialized PME for conventional officers and rotations of CF officers to SOF units that would provide some type of SO accreditation, such as a SO skill identifier, etc. Many Israeli commanders, for example, serve at least one tour in a SOF unit which enhances their understanding of how to integrate SOF into what would traditionally be CF missions (Henricksen 2007, 5). Lack of CF leader exposure to SOF and SOF capabilities hampers the development of SOF-CF interdependence.

Outside of the special operations community there is a remarkable lack of knowledge about special operations. In order to improve interdependence and operational adaptability, the Army must take steps to develop methods of training and educating leaders from the tactical level up. SOF operators are at an advantage when working with CF elements because nearly all SOF personnel start from a conventional background. For example, SOF officers attend basic and intermediate level PME with CF officers. Despite that, CF officers' exposure to SOF concepts is minimal; the Captain's Career Course (CCC) has only one hour of SOF education, intermediate level education (ILE) has four hours, and the US Army Senior Service College (SSC) has from one to three hours (Petit 2013). Aside from minimal SOF PME, most of the experience CF personnel gain with SOF personnel occurs in theater while conducting operations—keeping in mind that only a minority of CF units are involved in those kinds of joint operations. As operations draw

down in Afghanistan, the real possibility exists that the connection between SOF and CF which matured over the last decade to the point where the lessons from the VSO program could become lost. If the Army is serious about retaining and improving the ability to generate interdependent SOF-CF teams in order to have an impact in the human domain, then more must be done to educate CF about SOF. CF must interact with SOF in other ways than just while conducting operations. The Army must find a way to build the relationships between SOF and CF in training that were essential to success in operations.

The regional alignment concept offers an additional opportunity for the Army to facilitate SOF-CF relationships. To do regional alignment right, the Army should consider alignment within the context of developing interdependence and the realities of resource constraints for the training and manning of interdependent units. One way to accomplish regional alignment is to align forces to regions based on an assessment of conventional force capabilities and traditional missions, conventional force physical location, and traditional Army unit and combatant command relationships. While this method of alignment is a good way to efficiently establishing regional relationships, it fails to take into account development of SOF-CF interdependence. ARSOF has a long history of regionally aligning forces and, in places where SOF units are based, the infrastructure already exists to support the development of cultural awareness and regional education (Department of the Army 2010, 25). Furthermore, all SOF group level bases have conventional divisions co-located. In order to enhance interdependence, the Army should consider only regionally aligning those brigades that are already co-located with SOF groups. Such an alignment would encourage habitual planning and training relationships between SOF and CF and allow CF to leverage SOF educational tools to

enhance CF cultural and language capabilities. Failure to consider SOF-CF co-location as a part of overall regional alignment will lead to unnecessary friction to the process of building habitual relationships between SOF and CF elements and require additional expense to build language and cultural awareness programs to support CF formations.

The bottom line is that the Army cannot afford to wait until it arrives in theater to start the process of figuring out what adaptations are necessary for operational success. If the Army only starts to innovate once the battle begins, then the initiative in the fight is lost, perhaps not to return. Without a complex population-centric conflict to drive SOF-CF interaction, the Army will lose the ability to rapidly generate interdependent SOF-CF teams. An essential component of the flexibility for operational adaptability will be lost. To realize the Army leadership's vision for the future land force employment, the Army must take steps to institutionalize the lessons learned from development of the VSO program.

## GLOSSARY

7th Warfighting Function. Also referred to as the Special Operations Warfighting Function, refers to the concept of a new warfighting function that will allow the commander to operate in and shape populations and actors in his or her environment.

Human Domain. The totality of physical, cultural and social environments that influence human behavior to the extent that success of a military operation or campaign depends on the application of unique capabilities that are designed to fight and win population-centric conflicts.

Integration. Uniting and blending two separate types of forces, to varying proportions, that share unity of command and effort in order to accomplish a mission or conduct an operation.

Interdependence. The deliberate reliance, by two forces, on each force's unique capabilities to maximize the complementary and reinforcing effects of both.

Interoperability. 1. The ability to operate in synergy in the execution of assigned tasks. 2. The condition achieved among communications-electronics systems or items of communications-electronics equipment when information or services can be exchanged directly and satisfactorily between them and/or their users. The degree of interoperability should be defined when referring to specific cases.

Operational Adapatability. The fundamental characteristic of the Army that provides an ability to shape conditions and respond effectively to changing threats and situations with the appropriate, flexible, and timely actions required to execute a wide variety of missions.

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