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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.

**TRANSFORMING AMERICA'S MILITARY:  
INTEGRATING UNCONVENTIONAL GROUND FORCES  
INTO COMBAT AIR OPERATIONS**

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Maritime Operations.

Opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied in this academic research paper are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Naval War College, the United States Navy, the United States Air Force, the Department of Defense, or any other US government agency.

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**Abstract**

The War in Afghanistan has displayed two very powerful elements of our nation's war chest. The combination of Special Operations Forces and joint air forces decisively repulsed the outlaw Taliban. Synthesizing SOF and combat airpower is a transformation in the operational art of employing forces. American military experiences over the last decade, influenced by political constraints and a seeming desire by the American public to minimize friendly combatant and enemy non-combatant casualties, have forced our leadership to rethink the introduction of provocative large troop formations on foreign soil. In consequence, policy makers have chosen to depart significantly from land-centric strategies of warfare, turning instead to the global reach and precision engagement of joint air power as the method for projecting our nations influence. American involvement in major military actions since the end of Operation Desert Storm has been focused primarily on air and space resources directed and controlled by the JFACC. In Afghanistan, air power was significantly enhanced by unconventional forces on the ground. Meanwhile, forces of our ad hoc coalition partners have born the brunt of high intensity force-on-force land battles. The most recent example of this method for employing forces is the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan. In Central Asia, the forces providing terminal attack control, laser guidance, and target surveillance have been Special Operations Forces, CIA operatives, and indigenous coalition land forces. These are proving to be extremely effective ad hoc arrangements. This study examines the transformation of the American way of war and how to efficiently employ SOF and CIA operatives at the operational level in support of an air-centric operation.

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## *Abstract*

The War in Afghanistan has displayed two very powerful elements of our nation's war chest. The combination of Special Operations Forces and joint air forces decisively repulsed the outlaw Taliban. Synthesizing SOF and combat airpower is a transformation in the operational art of employing forces. American military experiences over the last decade, influenced by political constraints and a seeming desire by the American public to minimize friendly combatant and enemy non-combatant casualties, have forced our leadership to rethink the introduction of provocative large troop formations on foreign soil. In consequence, policy makers have chosen to depart significantly from land-centric strategies of warfare, turning instead to the global reach and precision engagement of joint air power as the method for projecting our nation's influence.

American involvement in major military actions since the end of Operation Desert Storm has been focused primarily on air and space resources directed and controlled by the Joint Forces Air Component Commander. In Afghanistan, air power was significantly enhanced by unconventional forces on the ground. Meanwhile, forces of our ad hoc coalition partners have born the brunt of high intensity force-on-force land battles. The most recent example of this method for employing forces is the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan. In Central Asia, the forces providing terminal attack control, laser guidance, and target surveillance have been Special Operations Forces, CIA operatives, and indigenous coalition land forces. These are proving to be extremely effective ad hoc arrangements. This study examines the transformation of the American way of war and how to efficiently employ SOF and CIA operatives at the operational level in support of an air-centric operation.

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To my wife, Mary, who endured our separations during deployments to Southern Watch and Allied Force with a brand new baby like a true champion. I truly appreciate your continued support. And to our son David, whose welcome interruptions while I stared blankly at the computer screen allowed me to readjust my attitude and to realize what is really important in life.

*“Transformation results from the exploitation of new approaches to operational concepts and capabilities, the use of old and new technologies, and new forms of organization that more effectively anticipate new or still emerging strategic and operational challenges and opportunities and that render previous methods of conducting war obsolete or subordinate.”*  
-QDR, 2001

Our nation’s most recent history has witnessed a transformation in the operational art of employing forces in combat. American military experiences over the last decade, influenced by political constraints and a seeming desire by the American public to minimize friendly combatant and enemy non-combatant casualties, have forced our leadership to rethink the introduction of provocative large troop formations on foreign soil.<sup>1</sup> In consequence, policy makers have chosen to depart significantly from land-centric strategies of warfare, turning to the global reach and precision engagement of airpower as the method for projecting our nation’s influence. American involvement in major military actions since the end of Operation Desert Storm has been focused primarily on combat air resources directed and controlled by the Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC). Meanwhile, forces of our coalition partners have fought the ensuing high intensity force-on-force land battles.

The most recent example of this method for employing forces is the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom clearly illustrates the thesis of this paper: integrating highly mobile, technically equipped, and digitally linked unconventional ground forces into combat air operations while using proxy armies to engage enemy fielded forces has fundamentally transformed the American way of war. This method is a militarily

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<sup>1</sup> Philip S. Meilinger, “Paradigm Regained?” *Washington Times*, 23 December 2001.

thrifty response to the nation's desire to quickly and decisively defeat opponents on the battlefield while limiting casualties of friendly forces and innocent civilians.

This conclusion was reached by assessing the emerging synergy between airpower, SOF, and CIA operatives in major combat operations since the Persian Gulf War. SOF command and control (C2) arrangements will be discussed in light of recent operational practices and the paper will conclude with recommendations to enhance further integration of unconventional forces into future combat air operations.

## **BACKGROUND: FROM VIETNAM TO AFGHANISTAN**

Neither airpower nor SOF center on the systems or personnel of any one service. The synergistic combination of joint operations will be essential to future military operations. Recent technological advances in satellite-assisted weapons guidance, laser range-finder accuracy, and communications relay equipment have expanded SOF's role in major theater conventional crises.

U.S. Special Operations ground forces consist of Army Rangers and Special Forces, Air Force Special Tactics Teams, and Navy Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) Teams. SOF are force multipliers for the entire spectrum of conflict, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the military effort.<sup>2</sup> They perform principal missions of unconventional warfare, psychological operations, counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, civil affairs, foreign internal defense, direct action (DA) and special reconnaissance (SR). The limitations of this paper preclude inclusion of all aspects of SOF capabilities and their diverse missions. The two missions that define SOF support for combat air actions are: DA, whereby they designate

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, *1998 Annual Report to the President and Congress*, n.d., Chapter 4, p.1, on-line, Internet, 23 January 2002, available from <http://www.dtic.mil/execsec/adr98/chap4.html>.

or illuminate strategic and operational level targets for precision-guided munitions to destroy, and, SR, whereby they provide target acquisition, area assessment, and post-strike reconnaissance data.<sup>3</sup> Over the years, airmen have used different types of ground liaisons to locate enemy targets so that commanders could exploit the advantages of airpower.

Air forces have been employed to support ground and naval forces seeking third and fourth dimensional advantage on the battlefield since military aircraft first appeared in combat during World War I.<sup>4</sup> The advent of two-way radio allowed observers on the ground to guide pilots to targets so they could deliver their ordnance more accurately and ensure deconfliction from friendly ground force positions. Ground Forward Air Controllers (Ground FACs) and Air Liaison Officers are attached to conventional ground units. They coordinate the requests and provide terminal control of supporting fires from the air for land force commanders.

Most Air Liaison Officers and Ground FACs are integrated into U.S. Army units. These forces have seen little combat action since the Persian Gulf War because their units are heavily equipped and difficult to deploy. SF and Air Force Special Tactics Teams, trained to provide terminal weapons guidance, are making up for the shortfall in deployable forward air controllers. They are also critical for locating and identifying targets of interest to the Joint Forces Commander and the JFACC.

In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, intelligence collection efforts shifted from human resources to aerospace vehicles outfitted with camera, infrared, and radar equipment that observe enemy territory from standoff distances. This reliance on advanced surveillance

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<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Special Operations Targeting and Mission Planning Procedures*, Joint Pub 3-05.5 (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 10 August 1993), p. II-1.

systems, as seen in Kosovo, has led to a decrease in the availability of seasoned human intelligence collectors able to provide targeting data. For those types of targets which the enemy attempts to conceal by camouflage, cover, movement, or deceptive decoy tactics, sophisticated overhead platforms are proving to be less capable of providing precise geographic locations to the targeting command and control element or loitering bomb droppers than are human resources on the ground.

It has become routine for U.S. air and space forces to neutralize stationary strategic targets. Locating and prosecuting attacks on mobile and time-critical-targets is more challenging. To achieve near real-time targeting requires support from units with critical capabilities to determine precise target locations, portable communications gear to relay data via radio or SATCOM, and if required, the ability to terminally guide precision weapons.

Special Forces gathered intelligence to support the limited bombing operations throughout the Vietnam War. One such mission entailed SF units being inserted into Laos to collect HUMINT for Operation Prairie Fire, an attempt aimed at infiltrating the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In a crude version of the system in use today, their inputs were fed into “the infiltration surveillance system code-named Task Force Alpha...the resulting intelligence became part of a targeting process that moved rapidly from an assessment officer manning a scope to another targeting process that moved rapidly from an assessment officer manning a scope to another officer who directed the airborne command post and called in strikes on specific targets.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It can be argued whether or not the strategic bombing campaign of World War II over Europe was in support of, or independent from, land force objectives. For this paper, the author will accept the argument that the bombing campaign was supportive of the overall theater commander's objectives.

<sup>5</sup> John Darrell Sherwood, *Fast Movers: Jet Pilots and the Vietnam Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), xiv-xv.

The status of SOF following the Vietnam War, Operation Desert One (the failed Iranian hostage rescue attempt), and Operation Urgent Fury (the disjointed Grenada operation) was described as, “fragmented and inadequately funded until Congress passed legislation in 1987 creating both the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict...and the U.S. Special Operations Command to both consolidate and advance the interests of the special operations community...”<sup>6</sup> The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991 provided an opportunity to display the resulting advancements made in joint special operations warfare. First, however, they would have to overcome lingering doubts in some senior officer circles as to what impact both SOF and airpower could have in the upcoming operation to liberate Kuwait.

The former commander of JSOC, Army General (Ret.) Wayne Downing, believed that “no matter how aggressively Air Force and Navy pilots attacked the Iraqis, they could not see from fifteen thousand feet what a soldier saw on the ground.”<sup>7</sup> His argument convinced the Pentagon to deploy Delta Forces to assist in hunting SCUDs in western Iraq. SOF performed covert reconnaissance, and then called in aircraft to strike SCUD launchers. “Although Blackhawk gunships occasionally struck enemy targets, the commandos’ principal mission was reconnaissance...they watched for military traffic and, with their radios, summoned air strikes.”<sup>8</sup> There is evidence that several successful tactical strikes were relayed to airborne fixed wing aircraft by the SOF commandos deployed deep into Iraqi territory for SCUD

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<sup>6</sup> John M. Collins, “Where Are Special Operations Forces?” *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Autumn 1993): 16.

<sup>7</sup> Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 140.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

launcher reconnaissance missions.<sup>9</sup> General Downing's belief was even more insightful for aerospace power's next major test in the Balkans.

The campaign over Kosovo was not a traditional military conflict. There was no direct clash of massed military ground forces in Operation Allied Force. US and European political leadership feared the introduction of ground forces into a bloody civil war. Unacceptable casualty rates on NATO's side might have produced domestic pressures in some European capitals to withdraw from the Alliance. To reduce the threat of significant casualties, NATO relied on precision strike aircraft and Tomahawk missiles to compel the Serbian leadership twice in the 1990s to cease its destabilizing ethnic cleansing campaigns. Airborne attacks to destroy and disrupt Serbian fielded forces in the Kosovo Engagement Zone were especially challenging. Balkan weather conditions, the Serb's resilient air defense system, and command-imposed minimum altitude restrictions made interdiction missions difficult and hindered airborne forward air controllers from differentiating convoy composition between fleeing refugees and Serb military forces. Remarkably, the low flying Army Apache helicopters that deployed with Task Force Hawk to Albania were never authorized to enter the fight.

Increasingly responsive to General Clark's demands to attack fielded forces in Kosovo, NATO's air-boss, US Air Force Lieutenant General Mike Short turned to the KLA to provide help in targeting its air strikes:

The full details of the covert support the KLA received from NATO countries are still unclear, but at least the US and Britain seem to have provided the KLA with training, aid, and equipment to both blow up Serbian targets in the field and to provide NATO aircraft with targeting data. US and British intelligence and Special Forces seem to have operated out of Albania, and other countries may have provided covert support as well...NATO began such covert support almost immediately after the start of the air and missile campaign, that the CIA had a major support mission based in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 178.

Tirana, Albania, and that 24 US Army Special Forces provided the KLA with training assistance....<sup>10</sup>

The synergy between the KLA and NATO was reinforced as the KLA helped provide targeting data, taking on the role as possible elements of NATO Special Forces by becoming forward air controllers.<sup>11</sup> SHAPE sources reported that the KLA increasingly acted as the equivalent of forward air controllers, greatly aiding in supplementing the targeting data provided by UAVs and JSTARS.<sup>12</sup> The effect of their assistance was seen in the reduction of collateral damage incidents in the latter months of the campaign.

As the air war progressed into the early summer months, NATO explored a ground option by taking advantage of a covert relationship between the CIA and the KLA to probe Serb ground defenses.<sup>13</sup> The Kosovar Albanian guerillas eventually launched a counteroffensive from Albania against Serb military forces in the Kosovo Engagement Zone. They used cell phones to call their commanders in Albania who passed on their air support requests and target locations to the NATO CAOC in Vicenza, Italy. KLA actions forced the Serb Army to mass formations and expose their locations where they would be less difficult to detect and more easily engaged by NATO attack and bomber aircraft after Serbia's air defense had become less of a threat.

Airpower's limited ability to destroy enemy fielded forces and mobile targets on the battlefield was identified in after action reports from both the Persian Gulf War and the Kosovo Air War. The minimum altitude restrictions placed on the aircraft contributed to several highly publicized misidentifications of targets leading to unintended civilian

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Lessons and Non-Lessons of the Air and Missile Campaign in Kosovo* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 27 July 1999) 250.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

casualties. Many other opportunities to destroy Serbian mobile forces and equipment were lost to bad weather, deception, and concealment by the Serbs. In Kosovo, there were no US ground forces in the JOA that could provide near real-time targeting data to the CAOC or even to overhead aircraft.<sup>14</sup>

Attempts to integrate intelligence agency operatives on the ground into air operations were in their infancy during Operation Allied Force. Operations in Afghanistan, on the other hand, have achieved timelier results with SOF and CIA spotters providing GPS coordinates to loitering fighter and bomber aircraft armed and eager to engage enemy targets of opportunity.

U.S. policy makers chose to employ an air-centric strategy in Afghanistan to destroy al Qaeda and overthrow the repressive Taliban regime. Special Operations Forces followed initial air strikes by intercontinental strategic bombers, TLAM missiles, and carrier-based fixed-wing aircraft aimed at defeating the Taliban's limited air defense capabilities. Their insertions complemented CIA operatives already in theater supporting the air campaign and set about advising, training, and assisting the Afghan Northern Alliance army as it waged a land war. In the absence of U.S. general purpose land forces, these unconventional units on the ground have become the critical link to providing nearly real-time intelligence and targeting of enemy fielded forces. Unprecedented rapid links between spotters on the ground and war planes overhead have allowed US forces to strike targets sometimes in less than 10 minutes.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment* (Santa Monica, California, Rand, 2001), 72.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Defense, *Report to Congress, Kosovo/Operation Allied Force After-Action Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 31 January 2000), 58.

<sup>15</sup> Christian Lowe, "Ground-to-Air Links Critical To Afghan Air War," *Army Times*, 28 January 2002, 10.

The Air Force Chief of Staff recently pointed out that the early air campaign was "the very best example of joint warfare going on today...Special Forces teams on the ground helped spot targets and avoid collateral damage."<sup>16</sup>

The change in the nature and conduct of air operations employed in the War in Afghanistan resulted from advances in technology and evolutions in joint doctrine. This approach to warfare consists of weapons being employed by airmen from sanctuary altitudes above surface-to-air threats, supported by SOF and CIA operatives behind enemy lines, equipped with optical lasing units, global positioning devices, laptop computers, and sophisticated communications suites to relay coordinates of stationary, mobile, and fleeting targets. These ground observers are able to identify targets unseen or difficult to detect by overhead collection resources. The destruction of these critical targets produced dramatic and decisive results. The air war over Afghanistan is convincing evidence that the Special Operations community has made significant progress in integrating its air and ground assets into joint campaign planning and operations.

## **COMMAND AND CONTROL RELATIONSHIPS**

Doctrinal issues concerning the command and control, roles, and missions of SOF in joint operations remain controversial. The services have forged constructive settlements to unity of command issues by subordinating the functional components to the JFC. However, well publicized disappointments, like Desert One and Somalia, produced skeptics in military circles. Not many conventional force commanders are versed in SOF capabilities and limitations.<sup>17</sup> Unity of effort has suffered in the past from inter-service squabbling over roles and priorities. For example, after General Downing and his Delta Force teams were

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Grier, "The Winning Combination of Air & Space," *Air Force Magazine*, 85 (January 2002): 74.

authorized by the NCA to deploy into the CENTCOM Theater during the Persian Gulf War, General Schwarzkopf reminded him, “I also want you to be sure you know who you are working for, and it isn’t General Stiner (Army General Carl Stiner, former USCINCSOC). You work for me....”<sup>18</sup> It is apparent that CINCCENT preferred to employ a JSOTF under his direct command during the SCUD hunt of Desert Storm. This is just one of several C2 options which SOF could fall under to respond to SECDEF and USSOCCOM mission tasking.

Joint doctrine outlines SOF C2 based on who they support. Unlike most conventional forces, SOF respond to two combatant chains of command. CONUS based SOF are aligned under USCINCSOC. SOF assigned permanently to a theater are under COCOM of the geographic combatant commander. USCINCSOC is normally the combatant commander for SOF tasked directly by the SECDEF. He may elect to retain COCOM of SOF for the most sensitive missions. When CONUS based SOF deploy to support a theater commander for a specific mission or crisis, USSOCOM normally retains COCOM but chops operational control (OPCON) of SOF forces to the gaining theater commander. Regardless of who SOF is assigned to, liaison between all components is vital to fratricide prevention and the effective employment of SOF.<sup>19</sup>

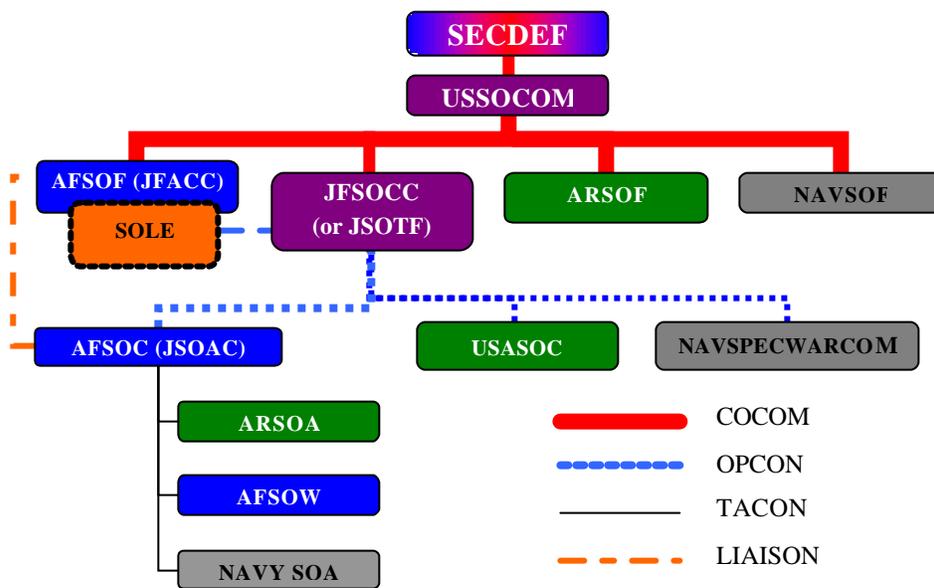
The command structure for a SOF centric operation is clean and simple. SOF forces are provided by service SO commands. COMAFSOC can expect to be the Joint Special Operations Air Component Commander (JSOACC) in discrete SOF operations if AFSOF provides the preponderance of air assets (see Figure 1).

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<sup>17</sup> John M. Collins, “Where Are Special Operations Forces?” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, (Autumn 1993): 16.

<sup>18</sup> Atkinson, 177.

The JSOACC would provide fixed and rotary wing joint air assets and AF Special Tactics Teams to support the CJSOTF priorities and missions. Other SOF ground forces would be provided by their respective service Special Operations Components. When SOF are forward deployed to support a geographic combatant commander, the JFC determines the most appropriate command relationships and may delegate OPCON or tactical control (TACON) to subordinate commanders to accomplish specified tasks or missions.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 1.** Organizational Chart - Autonomous SOF mission, with COMAFSOC as JSOACC

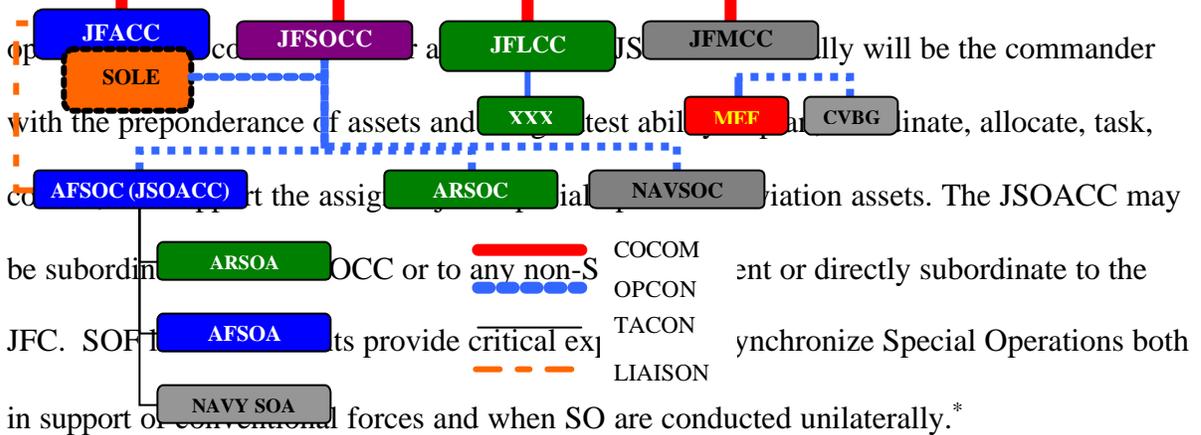
Figure 2 depicts a notional organization when SOF are tasked to support a theater commander during a regional crisis. The Joint Force Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC) is responsible for planning, coordinating, and making recommendations on the proper employment of SOF. The JFSOCC provides a special

<sup>19</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, Joint Pub 3-05 (Washington, D.C.: 17 April 1998), 34.

<sup>20</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Task Force Planning Guidance and Procedures*, Joint Pub 5-00.2 (Washington, D.C.: 13 January 1999), xiii.

operations liaison element (SOLE) to the JFACC staff to coordinate and synchronize SOF air and surface efforts with joint air operations. The SOLE chief works directly for the JFSOCC and places liaison officers throughout the JFACC staff. The SOLE coordinates during ATO construction to reconcile duplicate targeting, resolve airspace deconfliction, and prevent fratricide.<sup>21</sup>

The JSOTF commander normally employs specialized organizations to assist in the C2 of SOF. The JSOACC is crucial in any air-centric operation, and is responsible for planning and executing joint special air operations and for coordinating and deconflicting such



<sup>21</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Special Operations Operational Procedures*, Joint Pub 3-05.3 (Washington, D.C.: 25 August 1993), III-7.

\* Descriptions of SOF Command and Control derived from Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Fire Support*, Joint Publication 3-09 (Washington, D.C.: 12 May 1998), pp. II-12 thru II-16.

**Figure 2.** Notional Theater Organization Chart-Functional Relationship

SOF air and ground forces can contribute to joint air operations in many ways. SOF provide stealth and precision attack as an alternative to conventional aerospace power. The JFACC can request the use of SOF as an economy of force measure to destroy certain targets, freeing air assets to concentrate against other targets more suitable for air attack.<sup>22</sup> Joint Pub 3-05.3, *Joint Special Operations Operational Procedures*, goes on to describe further SOF contributions to air operations:

SOF may offer a more surgical effect than current air delivered weapons can deliver. The JFACC may have targets that require specific damage effects (or the limitation of collateral damage) beyond the capabilities of precision-guided munitions. These may include the destruction of weapons of mass destruction or their production facilities without the spread of deadly contaminants. SOF have unique capabilities that can enhance joint aerospace operations. For example, SOF aircraft can deliver the 15,000 pound BLU-82 bomb for psychological effect or to create an instant helicopter landing zone.<sup>23</sup>

There may be alternate command and control structures that could streamline SOF integration into an air-centric campaign. These arrangements would centralize decision making with the commander that has conducted the majority of operations in the last two major campaigns undertaken by the American military. This method would resemble an arrangement described in Air Force Doctrine Document 2 for SOF aviation assets:

“The JFC may assign control of SOF aviation forces to either a Service or a functional component commander. When SOF air assets are employed as part of joint SOF operations, the JFC may assign control of those forces to the joint force special operations component commander (JFSOCC). However, if SOF aviation assets are assigned primarily in support of the theater air operation, then the JFC may assign control of those assets to the JFACC.”<sup>24</sup>

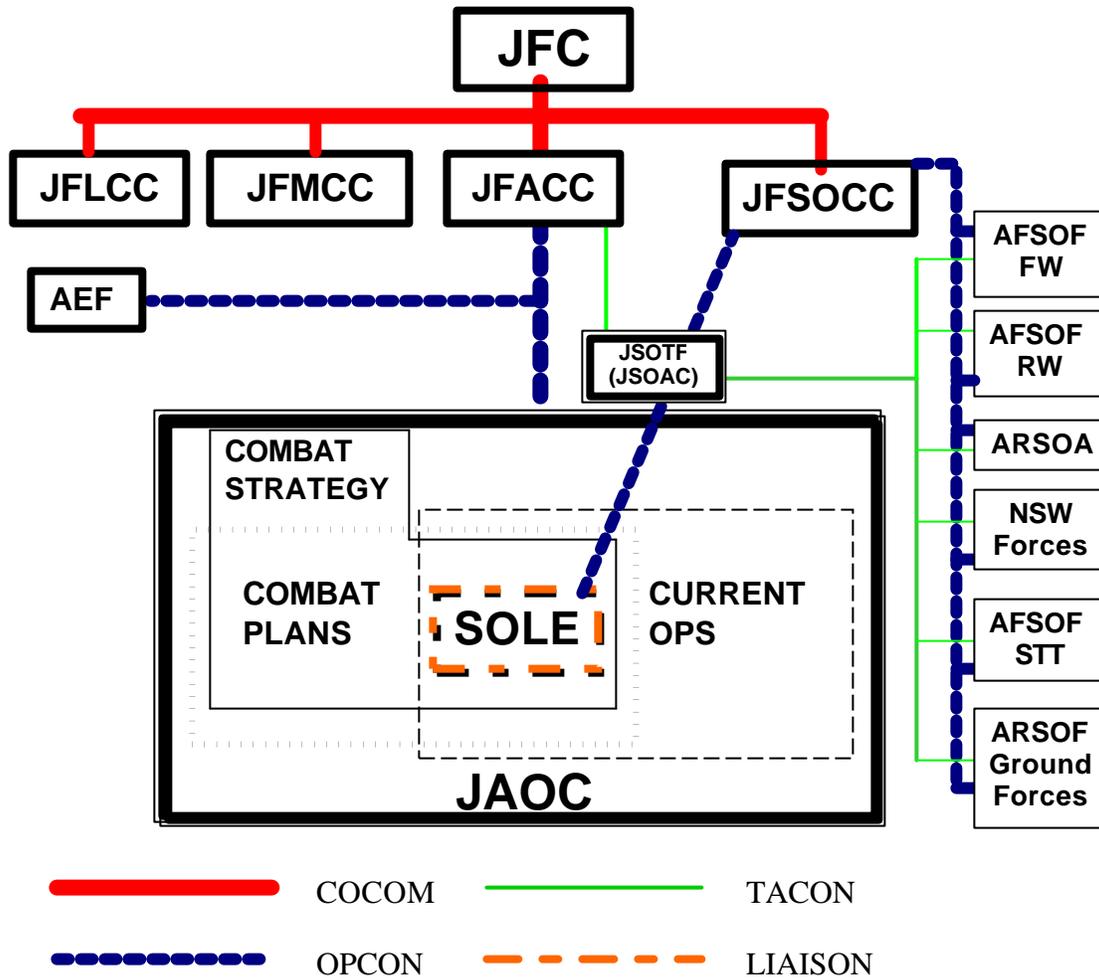
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<sup>22</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Special Operations Operational Procedures*, Joint Pub 3-05.3 (Washington, D.C.: 25 August 1993), III-8.

<sup>23</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Special Operations Operational Procedures*, Joint Pub 3-05.3 (Washington, D.C.: 25 August 1993), III-8.

<sup>24</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, “*Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power*,” Air Force Doctrine Document 2, (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: 17 February 2000), 57.

SOF may enhance joint air operations with unique personnel and platform capabilities, such as providing a tailored joint special operations task force, under the TACON of the JFACC, to assist in locating deep targets.<sup>25</sup> These ad hoc arrangements between airpower, intelligence agency operatives, and SOF ground forces need to be further explored.



**Figure 3.** Proposed Organization Chart reflecting JSOAC TACON to JFACC

In Figure 3, a notional theater air-centric operation, TACON of SOF aviation *and* SOF ground units supporting the air operation are assigned to the JFACC to further unity of effort.

OPCON would remain with the JFSOCC, and all the trappings OPCON entails would remain in effect. This arrangement would be effective during the initial stages of an operation, nominally the halt and battlefield preparation phases, now referred to as the *seize initiative* and preliminary *decisive operations* phases in the current joint lexicon.<sup>26</sup>

This concept would allow full integration of the SOLE into the JFACCs staff. The integration of SOLE into the JFACC staff would provide seamless coordination, deconfliction, and integration of SOF strategies, operations, and plans with conventional air. In Combat Plans, SOF air planners would develop, coordinate, and submit SOF tasks for the next day's operations into the single theater ATO. They can request conventional air support of SOF and task SOF ground support through the CJSOTF. In Combat Operations, SOF air operations officers would monitor ongoing missions, making time critical decisions as they arise. Co-location of the JFACC and JSOAC staffs would prevent communication and coordination problems inherent in geographically separated headquarters.

Since CIA operatives are not military assets, their contributions to the air war will have to be realized on case by case basis with layers of liaisons ensuring interoperability and effectiveness.

As with all national assets, the President, Secretary of Defense, and Combatant Commanders jealously protect their jurisdiction of SOF. C2 relationships are traditional friction points in joint military operations. Some will argue that TACON of SOF air and ground assets under the JFACC are forfeiting the unity of command offered by current

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<sup>25</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Command and Control for Joint Air Operations*, Joint Publication 3-56.1 (Washington D.C.: 14 November 1994), B-2.

<sup>26</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, Joint Pub 3-0 (Washington, D.C.: 10 September 2001), III-19.

organizational templates. In air-centric operations, unity of effort must take precedence over perceived service or functional primacy.

SOF perform multiple missions in the theater that do not directly impact the air operation. It is therefore incumbent upon the JFACC to rely on the JSOAC and SOLE for their invested experience and advice on the proper employment and ops tempo of the Special Tactics and Special Forces teams on the ground.

Not every conflict the US engages in will we have the opportunity to make use of indigenous forces to do the high-intensity fighting. In the event we have to use our own ground forces, the battlefield will have to be overwhelmingly prepared by the synergistic effects of airpower with SOF assistance before committing large numbers of American ground forces. Should the U.S. be forced to enter a mature fight, amid modern SAM threats, and without the advantage of a six month buildup period, asymmetric stealth airpower enhanced by near real-time UAV and satellite battlefield intelligence will have to be relied on to delay and disrupt enemy forces in conjunction with friendly maneuvers.

Lastly, some will argue that it isn't SOF supporting airpower, but just the opposite. Unfortunately, SOF insertions into Afghanistan did not vanquish the terrorizing enemy forces. On the contrary, the initial "staged-for-television" Army Ranger airborne raid on a supposedly poorly-defended airfield in late October was met with stiff resistance.<sup>27</sup> It was the ferocity of weaponry that rained down from the skies that sent Taliban forces fleeing for their lives. SOF have been highly effective enablers that made each bomb dropped by an airman count. The effects of seeing the lead Toyota SUV filled with fellow Taliban fighters explode

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<sup>27</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, "Escape and Evasion: What Happened when the Special Forces landed in Afghanistan?" *The New Yorker*, 12 November 2001, *Lexis-Nexis*, Dayton, Ohio: Lexis-Nexis (24 January 2002), 50.

in a ball of fire must have been extremely painful--physically and mentally--for enemy combatants to witness. Bombing works.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

SOF must continue to integrate their roles into conventional missions. Integration is crucial because air assets and SOF are the only forces that routinely operate deep in enemy territory.<sup>28</sup> The ability of military forces to communicate and operate seamlessly on the battlefield will be critical to success.<sup>29</sup> Joint Vision 2020 states “command and control will remain the primary integrating and coordination function for operational capabilities...there is a need to evaluate continually the nature of command and control organization, mechanisms, systems, and tools.”<sup>30</sup> The following recommendations are based on an analysis of the current integration of SOF into joint air campaign planning and execution:

☹ Future JFCs should adopt a version of the C2 arrangement described in Figure 3 whereby the JFACC exercises TACON of SOF air and ground assets through a collocated JSOAC and SOLE. Competent SOF planners would have to reside in the Joint Planning Group advising the JFC. The SOLE and JSOAC Commander will be the linchpin liaisons in the Joint Air Operations Center contributing to both the combat plans and the combat operations branches. This concept provides a viable option for the centralized control of aerospace assets and their supporting forces in an air campaign while preventing stovepiped chains of command. Staff integration, connectivity, differing priorities, and institutional

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<sup>28</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power*, (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: 17 February 2000), 57.

<sup>29</sup> Alex Johnson, et al., “Rumsfeld Seeks Big Rise in Budget for the Pentagon” *News from MSNBC*, 31 January 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, 31 January 2002, available from <http://www.msnbc.com/news/697252.asp?pne=msn>.

<sup>30</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision 2020*, (Washington, D.C.: June 2000), pp. 31-32.

biases that have hampered previous attempts at integrating joint air assets will have to be overcome to realize closer coordination between agencies.

☞ JFCs should establish an objective based parameter drawn from campaign phasing that determines when the JFACC would transfer authority of SOF assets to the JSOCC.

During the halt and battlefield prep phase of the operation, the JSOACC can act as a conduit between the JFACC and the JSOCC for autonomous SOF operations requiring the JFACC to relinquish TACON of SOF air and/or ground forces for specific missions or periods of time. Having the JSOACC collocated with the JFACC staff would allow him to seamlessly integrate non-SOF aerospace assets into any SOF-centric mission the SECDEF, USSOCOM, or the JFC desired.

‡ SOF and their liaison elements on the JFACC staff should rehearse their roles to further integrate Special Operations air and ground assets into an effective war fighting capability while surmounting doctrinal friction for this new C2 concept. There can be no doubt that combat readiness flows from "training like we fight" at all levels of command. Joint exercises where SOF and CIA operatives could integrate into live fly scenarios are numerous. The author recommends the Air Force's Red Flag exercises at Nellis AFB, Nevada, where joint training missions simulate the first ten days of intense combat action. Red Flag provides a wealth of airborne assets, realistic target sets, and debriefing tools to enhance training experiences for both aviator and unconventional ground forces. Exercise Panther Leap, a SOF exercise, employs a unique mix of real-world equipment, high fidelity simulators, and constructive simulations that create an integrated live and synthetic

environment in order to simulate a joint tactical SOF mission involving combined air and unconventional ground operations.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The War in Afghanistan has illustrated the synergy which airpower and Special Operations components afford the national military leadership. Instead of a costly, time-consuming, and potentially coalition-splitting land force deployment, national commanders used CIA and SOF units to support air operations while emboldening the Northern Alliance to expunge the repressive Taliban from power. Not only have SOF been crucial to the success in Afghanistan, but they are likely to be the only significant ground forces that America uses anywhere around the world in its long-term fight against terrorism.<sup>32</sup>

Matching operatives on the ground with airborne strike assets is proving to be a highly effective partnership. President Bush, in an address to the cadets at the Citadel noted “that the combination of ‘real-time intelligence, local allied forces, Special Forces, and precision power’ that shattered the Taliban regime ‘has never been used before.’”<sup>33</sup>

The improved operational capability and synergistic effects of Joint SOF integrated into conventional aerospace operations support Joint Vision 2010’s concept of effects-based precision engagement: locating and tracking objectives or targets, providing responsive command and control, ensuring weapons hit the correct target, generating the desired effect, assessing the level of success, and retaining the flexibility to reengage.<sup>34</sup> The co-evolution of advanced communication and video data-link systems provide the ground element the

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<sup>31</sup> Mike Durant and Alesya Paschal, “Panther Leap: Joint Tactical Mission in a Synthetic Environment,” *Special Warfare* (Winter 2000): 16.

<sup>32</sup> John Barry and Michael Hirsh, “Commandos: The Real Tip of the Spear,” *Newsweek*, 8 October, 2001, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Mike Allen, “Bush Cites Need to Overhaul Military,” *Washington Post*, 12 December 2001, sec. 1, p. 3.

capability to relay near real-time intelligence and target coordinates to airborne attack aircraft so they can be serviced at an overpowering tempo unseen in previous conflicts.

The traditional American way of war has been to overwhelm our enemies with massive troop formations supported by massive national mobilization and logistics. This “new” opportunity to employ surrogate forces to fight the land battles may not be the first time these elements have been seen in history. For nearly three hundred years Great Britain maintained an expansive empire by relying on a small, professional army and a strong, power projecting navy, while relying on mercenary and allied armies to fight her land battles. She invested in small, high-payoff forces, like heavily armed cavalryman of the Dragoon regiments and the mounted Scotts Greys. Great Britain couldn’t afford the losses in manpower expected during the levee en masse campaigns fighting against Napoleon on the European Continent.

Today we see America adopting a 300-year old strategy to avert combat casualties. While surrogate armies duke it out on the fields of fire, she invests in high payoff, risk reducing, and economy of force weapons with great power projection capabilities to achieve the strategic and operational objectives.

Potential adversaries will continue to employ unconventional approaches to circumvent or undermine U.S. and allied strengths and exploit our vulnerabilities.<sup>34</sup> Our response for the foreseeable future will continue to be the range, mobility, and flexibility joint airpower systems provide. This method of force application maintains a relatively benign environment for U.S. forces, while achieving a new level of battlefield dominance by attacking the enemy directly, decisively, and in parallel across the three spectrums of warfare with aerospace

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<sup>34</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision 2010* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office), 21.

<sup>35</sup> Cordesman, 265.

power. Implementing the recommendations of this paper will allow military commanders to meet the numerous challenges in conflicts of both today and tomorrow.

### *Glossary*

**AEF**—Air Expeditionary Force  
**AFB**—Air Force Base  
**AFSOC**—Air Force Special Operations Command (in theater, Component)  
**AFSOF**—Air Force Special Operations Forces  
**AFSOW**—Air Force Special Operations Wing  
**ARSOA**—Army Special Operations Air  
**ARSOA**—Army Special Operations Command (in theater, Component)  
**ARSOF**—Army Special Operations Forces  
**ATO**—Air Tasking Order  
**C2**—Command and Control  
**CAOC**—Combined Air Operations Center  
**CENTCOM**—Central Command  
**CIA**—Central Intelligence Agency  
**CINCCENT**—Commander in Chief, Central Command  
**CJSOTF**—Commander, Joint Special Operations Task Force  
**CJTF**—Commander, Joint Task Force  
**COCOM**—Combatant Command (command authority)  
**COMAFSOC**—Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command (in theater, Component)  
**COMSOC**—Commander, Special Operations Command (in theater, Component)  
**CONUS**—Continental United States  
**CVBG**—Carrier Battle Group  
**DA**—Direct Action  
**FAC**—Forward Air Controller  
**GPS**—Global Positioning Satellite  
**HUMINT**—Human Intelligence  
**JCS**—Joint Chiefs of Staff  
**JFACC**—Joint Force Air Component Commander  
**JFMCC**—Joint Force Maritime Component Commander  
**JFLCC**—Joint Force Land Component Commander  
**JFC**—Joint Force Commander  
**JFSOCC**—Joint Forces Special Operations Component Commander  
**JOA**—Joint Operations Area  
**JSOAC**—Joint Special Operations Air Component  
**JSOACC**—Joint Special Operations Air Component Commander  
**JSOC**—Joint Special Operations Command  
**JSOTF**—Joint Special Operations Task Force

**JSTARS**—Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System  
**KLA**—Kosovo Liberation Army  
**MEB**—Marine Expeditionary Brigade  
**NATO**—North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
**NAVSPECWARCOM**—Naval Special Warfare Special Operations Command  
**NAVSOC**—Naval Special Warfare Special Operations Command (in theater, Component)  
**NAVSOA**—Naval Special Warfare Special Operations Air  
**NAVSOF**—Naval Special Warfare Special Operations Forces  
**NCA**—National Command Authorities  
**NSW**—Naval Special Warfare  
**OPCON**—Operational Control  
**QDR**—Quadrennial Defense Review  
**SATCOM**—Satellite Communications  
**SEAL**—Sea-Air-Land (Team)  
**SECDEF**—Secretary of Defense  
**SHAPE**—Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe  
**SF**—Special Forces  
**SO**—Special Operations  
**SOF**—Special Operations Forces  
**SOLE**—Special Operations Liaison Element  
**SOTAC**—Special Operations Terminal Attack Controller  
**SR**—Special Reconnaissance  
**STT**—Special Tactics Team  
**SUV**—Sports Utility Vehicle  
**TACON**—Tactical Control  
**TLAM**—Tomahawk Land Attack Missile  
**USASOC**—Army Special Operations Command  
**USCINCSOC**—Commander in Chief, United States Special Operations Command  
**USSOCOM**—United States Special Operations Command

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