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JSOU Report 13-1 21st Century SOF: Toward an American Theory of Special Operations Yarger

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21st Century SOF: Toward an American Theory of Special Operations

Harry R. Yarger
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Joint Special Operations University and the Strategic Studies Department

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On the cover. A Marine with a company from 2nd Marine Special Operations Battalion watches the road ahead from his position as a rear gunner on a Ground Mobility Vehicle while traveling toward Dixie Valley, Nevada. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Edmund L. Hatch)

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Foreword

In the 2011 Joint Special Operations University workshop, *SOF-Power Workshop: A Way Forward for Special Operations Theory and Strategic Art*, the attendees concluded that a healthy strategic culture and the proper practice of a SOF strategic art hinged on the development of a suitable special operations theory for the 21st century. Only a few individuals, including the current USSOCOM commander, have undertaken to offer a theory of SOF in the past. However, many others have provided insights and premises to how SOF achieve success. Not the least among these are what SOF culture and doctrine espouses based on SOF experience.

In this concise JSOU monograph, Dr. Rich Yarger considers the 21st century security environment, previous work on special operations theory, and various other perspectives of SOF gleaned from his research to synthesize an American SOF school of thought, which he argues provides a foundation for developing an American special operations theory for the 21st century. He offers definitions, premises, and principles that explain modern American special operations over the last 70 years and can serve SOF well into the future. Based on his research, he identifies major areas of concern for SOF leadership.

As USSOCOM confronts the challenges offered by the 21st century and policymakers continue to look at SOF as a preferred means to address numerous and complex security issues, theory is essential in determining and explaining the appropriate roles and missions for SOF in the 21st century and for building and sustaining the forces. It explains the strategic utility of SOF, bolsters the strategic art within SOF, and informs doctrine. This monograph offers a basis toward such a theory.

Kenneth H. Poole, Ed.D.
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

About the Author

Harry R. (Rich) Yarger, Ph.D., is a JSOU senior fellow at the Joint Special Operations University and recently served as the Ministry Reform Analyst in the Security, Reconstruction and Transition Division of the Peacekeeping & Stability Operations Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He has been associated with JSOU for over a decade.

Prior to joining the Institute in September 2009, he served as Professor of National Security Policy in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College where he held the Elihu Root Chair of Military Studies and taught courses in: fundamentals of strategic thinking; theory of war and strategy; national security policy and strategy; grand strategy; terrorism; and the interagency. His research focuses on strategic theory, national security policy and strategy, terrorism, irregular warfare, effective governance, and the education and development of strategic level leaders.

In addition to teaching positions, he served five years as the chairman of the Army War College's Department of Distance Education. Dr. Yarger has also taught at the undergraduate level at several colleges. His book, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century* was released by Praeger Security International in July 2008. An edited work, *Short of General War: Perspectives on the Use of Military Power in the 21st Century*, was published by the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) in 2010. "How Students Learn Strategy?" a chapter in *Teaching Strategy: Challenge and Response*, was also an SSI release. A second edited text, *Transitions: Issues, Challenges and Solutions in International Assistance*, was released in 2011.

A retired Army colonel, he is a Vietnam veteran and served in both Germany and Korea. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College and obtained his doctorate in history from Temple University with fields in U.S. military history, U.S. diplomatic history, European diplomatic history, and American social history.

Author's Note

An American special operations theory and SOF's strategic performance are subjects that have fascinated me for over a decade. I am not alone in that fascination and the references herein represent only a few of the people who have struggled with these topics. Thus, I should acknowledge upfront that the thinking of many more than are referenced herein have influenced my thinking. I have used all that I have learned from my own research and members of the SOF community shamelessly, and sometimes in ways the originator may not agree with entirely. Consequently, I have that author's impending sense of remorse that I may have missed acknowledging some specific contribution in my pursuit of articulating a concise understanding of American military special operations. I had a lot of help from a multitude who wanted a proper theory articulated. In particular, I would like to thank the numerous JSOU senior fellows, who listened patiently and helped clarify my thinking at various times over the years. Several of these fellows' works are used and cited in this monograph. I would also be remiss if I did not specifically acknowledge that it was Joe Celeski and Bill Mendel who mentored me most and kept reminding me to put something down on paper. There is much more to be done in regard to special operations theory and I hope this monograph informs that effort.

1. Introduction

> There is a need for a theory of special operations to guide the application of SOF to strategic ends beyond the ad hoc, immediate, and creative mind of the military planner implementing strategy.
> – Robert G. Spulak, A Theory of Special Operations (2007)[1]

American Special Operations Forces (SOF) possess an amazing history and an emerging doctrine, but too little in the way of a unifying theory—a theory that explains American SOF and how it fits into U.S. national security. The lack of such a theory is odd given the public's fascination with special operators, the U.S. Congress' legislative support, policymakers' penchant for their use, and the number of popular movies and books—both factual accounts and fiction—produced. In fact, only a handful of individuals have undertaken the effort to articulate a theory. Most notable among the more recent of these are William H. McRaven in his 1995 *SPEC OPS: Case Studies in Special Operations, Theory and Practice*[2] and Robert G. Spulak, Jr.'s thoughtful follow-on monograph, *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF*.[3] Both of these works introduced core insights into what special operations and SOF are and what makes them successful. *SPEC OPS* is often characterized as having a tactical focus, and indeed it is action focused with its case studies, but it extrapolates these cases into a theoretical construct and provides seeds for a broader theory. In *A Theory of Special Operations*, Spulak expands on McRaven's contributions of the relationship of SOF and friction and distinct personnel attributes within SOF, and he argues an essential necessity of a SOF role at the strategic level. Others over the years from inside and outside of the special operations community shared insights and conclusions about the special operations phenomenon, scattering bits and pieces that add to an understanding. Much of this is captured in doctrine and in the SOF Truths; the latter reflecting what the community of special operators believes about the force.[4] This monograph seeks to expand on these authors' contributions as well as extrapolate others' works and thoughts—and SOF practice, doctrine, and culture—to lay the basis of a more unified American special operations theory and better understanding of the American school of thought.

The timing for advancing a comprehensive theory of American special operations could not be more opportune for several reasons. First, with over 70 years of modern history, the American SOF reputation has never stood higher in the esteem of the public and policymakers. In the last two decades special operations have taken on a greater role in national defense, and policymakers and strategists have found utility in the kind of military power SOF projects. Such recognition is a double-edged sword. The nation has been confronted with significant challenges in the first half of the 21st century that have already strained the capacity of the United States and its strategic partners to deal with them. Policymakers and the 2012 Defense Strategy are correct to recognize the relevance of SOF to these threats and opportunities, but in advocating the greater use of special operations they clearly do not grasp what the SOF Truths imply about SOF capacity.[5] As a result, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) must parley the hard-earned esteem won by special operators over the past decade to build the force for the future while advising policymakers and senior military decision makers on how best to use a qualitatively constrained SOF capacity. Concurrently, a number of people question whether the greatest strategic utility is being made of SOF power.[6] This is not a questioning of SOF personnel's efforts, but a genuine concern about how unique and limited capabilities are used, or not used, and how they might best be used in the future. A unified theory would inform how best to wield the SOF sword.

Second, under USSOCOM, SOF have matured into a discrete military force with many of the distinguishing characteristics that define a separate service. Theories and schools of thought explain how each service fits into the nation's security, sets the parameters for roles and missions, lays the basis for a strategic art, and informs doctrine and the professional development of the force. In the past, SOF have relied on mentoring, on-the-job experience, a limited doctrine, and a high degree of flexibility and adaptability. Notwithstanding the great need for and value of the latter, a theory and school of thought provide perspective for strategy, mission planning, and improvising when in contact with the enemy, significantly shortening and lowering the cost of the learning curve at all levels of war.

Third, theories and schools of thought, and the challenges to them, inform the debates about force structure and allocation of resources internal to each service and among the services in the wider arenas of the executive department and Congress. For this process to work properly, SOF must

debate from a common, intellectually defensible basis. Theory and a coherent school of thought will help SOF leaders, and the force as a whole, to meet their professional obligations to advise political leadership on how to protect and advance U.S. interests, prepare for war, and conduct war.

Theory means different things to different people, and it is important to understand the role of theory before undertaking the writing or reading of it. Some within SOF oppose theory because they fear theory would box SOF in when one SOF strength is its opportunistic nature.[7] Theory's purpose is neither to provide a prescription for success nor constrain choices, but to serve as a framework to help broaden and discipline thinking in ways that lead to better understanding and choices. It helps inform the debate about special operations and SOF issues, but should never become dogma. Clausewitz put theory in perspective almost 200 years ago, arguing theory is best used to educate the mind.

> Theory then becomes a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from books; it will light his way, ease his progress, training his judgment, and help him to avoid pitfalls. … Theory exists so that one need not start afresh each time sorting out the material and plowing through it, but will find it ready to hand and in good order. It is meant to educate the mind of the future commander.[8]

Various constructs exist for what constitutes the components of good military theory. In general, such a theory would explain the nature and purpose of the subject, provide essential terminology and definitions, explain the essential assumptions and premises of the theory, explain the relationships among these concepts and ideas internally and externally, and perhaps relate the theory to the past, present, and future. In essence, a coherent SOF theory accounts for the past and informs the debate in regard to critical questions that will help guide the American SOF community into the future. Not all of the questions are known, but the major ones are clear. What is SOF power? What are special operations and SOF? Why do special operations and SOF exist? How do they fit into the larger constructs of American national security and the American military? What are SOF's strengths and constraints? How do special operations and SOF achieve success? How do SOF achieve strategic effect? What does the special operations and SOF experience to date reveal, and what does it imply for the future?

Special operations and SOF have been the subject of numerous publications within the military and policy worlds and in the commercial marketplace. Many of these have a tactical focus and have held the American public spellbound by the actions of special operators. Others have sought to provide a strategic or operational perspective of the role of special operations and SOF, or illuminate some particular interest of the author in special operations and SOF. USSOCOM has sought to develop doctrine and greater knowledge about what SOF are, how they have operated in the past, and how they must operate in the future. Joint Special Operations University publications contribute significantly to the latter. All of these efforts provide insights into a theory of American special operations and constitute an emerging school of thought. Thus, much of what constitutes a theory is not new knowledge. This monograph seeks to concisely and coherently summarize and extrapolate from the existing research and the experience, thinking, and practice of the SOF community the foundation for a unified theory and school of thought for American special operations. It follows a very simple logic: (1) examine the complexity of the security environment and the value of SOF power; (2) understand how special operations, SOF, and SOF power are defined and interrelated in an American theory; (3) review and analyze key perspectives of special operations and SOF; (4) propose a set of premises and principles that explain American special operations and SOF theoretically; and (5) illustrate some of the future implications of the theory for SOF leadership. By definition a monograph is a concise treatment of a subject, and this monograph leaves much for deeper consideration and further development. Its purpose will be well served if it does no more than help clarify the questions and focus the debate.

2. A Complex Security Environment and SOF Power

> Thinking about the future requires an understanding of both what is timeless and what will likely change. – The JOE 2010: Joint Operating Environment[9]

Since the end of the Cold War, intellectual analyses of the contemporary and future security environments have proliferated. The vast majority of the reports, studies, and books resulting from or making use of these argue that it is a brand new world that requires new security solutions. It should be so simple! The reality is far more complex: a world in which central continuities of the past are hyper-interacting with the unprecedented changes characterizing the 21st century. As consequence, the strategic environment is in a period of flux and risk in which the United States and its strategic partners are confronted with a broad spectrum of old and new security threats and challenges.[10] SOF will play a central role in dealing with and overcoming these but is only one aspect of the military element of power that must be applied.

Signposts of the 21st Century

Security analyses generally follow a similar pattern. Major trends are identified and security threats are inferred from the impact of the trends on the status quo. While the list of trend categories may vary depending on the specific goals of the analysis, a common list includes: demographics, globalization, economics, energy, food, water, climate change, natural disasters, pandemics, cyber, space, et cetera.[11] An analysis can only identify possibilities; it cannot predict the future. For example, analysts have been predicting a new series of Middle East wars based on water shortages for decades. It remains a possibility, but it has not occurred.[12] Trends interact in the environment among themselves and with events and the actions of state and individual actors in ways that preclude reliable prediction.

Such interaction complicates individual issues, adds complexity to the security environment, and sometimes begets new trends. For example, China's rapid economic development, which is part of a U.S.-led strategy of integrating China

into the global economic security order, produced energy concerns in China leading to a more active diplomacy with energy rich states and subsequent increases in oil prices because of accelerated Chinese energy demands. Obviously, U.S. policy was not seeking higher oil prices. Similarly, democratization, a highly desired and welcomed re-emergent trend at the end of the Cold War, was accompanied by the resurgence of extremist nationalism and religion. In addition, the negative trends associated with urbanization, fragile and failing states, and rise of radical ideologies are in part the unwanted stepchildren of changing demographics, worldwide economic development, and globalization. As a consequence of the interaction among these trends and the choices of human actors, terrorism became a major global threat. Yet, at the same time other trends in demographics, economic development, and globalization are very positive. As the JOE 2010 notes, "The value of such efforts lays … in … wrestling with the possibilities, determining the leading indicators, and then reading the signposts of the times" in order to prepare and act.[13]

Four large "signposts" should dominate the thinking of U.S. military decision makers and strategists over the next two decades. The first of these is the global scale and scope of the ongoing changes in the social and economic life of the world's populations. The "establishment of information and knowledge—their production, dissemination, storage, and use—as the fundamental social and economic activity, rather than the cultivation of agriculture or the production of manufactured goods," and the subsequent changes wrought, and yet to be produced, have dramatic implications for states and the international order.[14] This phenomenon and its consequences, often referred to more generally as "globalization," represents a grand and global social-economic change that cuts across and interacts with all the strategic trends of analysis and every aspect of modern and traditional life.

Some argue that for historical precedence to understand the scale and scope of ongoing change, we must look back to the industrial revolution and its effects on the economic, social, and political orders of the time. Simply stated, the industrial revolution changed the world. In the process, the existing global order was prone to great disorder. The French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the colonial wars, labor disorders, anarchists, rise of socialism and communism, and World Wars I and II are but a few examples of the resulting disorder. In many ways, today's world is a better informed and more unified world than in previous centuries, and the changes proffer a much better future for those populations that embrace them successfully.[15] Hopefully, politicians and populations will find more peaceful and rapid ways of adaptation than in the past, but until this grand change is part of a new global status quo, many of the

trends will add complexity to the security challenges and be harbingers of instability and conflict.

... but until this grand change is part of a new global status quo, many of the trends will add complexity to the security challenges and be harbingers of instability and conflict.

A second signpost military decision makers and strategists must heed is that the past is always important. Any future stable world order will be a mixture of ongoing changes and continuities from the past. Continuities represent stability in cultures and societies and are central to successful progress in human social systems. Change is an unknown and to some degree threatening to most people, even when it offers great opportunity. This is true in all societies, but particularly so in more traditional cultures. Continuities have a paradoxical relationship with change. On the one hand, the greater the change, the more people tend to cling to an idealized past or embrace past injustices as the reason for an increasingly unsatisfactory status quo. On the other hand, continuities are an essential bridge to the future. This paradox explains in part the rise and support of Islamic extremism and the solution to it.

As peoples in many of these underdeveloped states become more aware of their relative deprivation, they want to blame the non-Islamic interlopers for their plight rather than addressing the necessity to change. Both governments and other actors use religion to promote such views and retain or acquire power. Religion is a central construct in Islamic cultures, explaining for most believers every aspect of their lives. If those cultures are to modernize, the continuity of religion and faith must help explain a proper way forward. Devout Islamists and legitimate governments must work together for successful transition. In contrast, extremists have used religion to justify a war against modernity—even when the evidence overwhelmingly discredits their idealized past.

Continuities that are important to people are resilient and add complexity to the security environment. They linger and become a part of the problem or a part of a solution, but invariably manifest themselves in some form in the future. The past and how it is considered and used in decision making and strategy formulation will determine to a large degree the nature of future stability or instability. The greater the change, the more important it is to understand and integrate the past.

War and conflict are major continuities in the affairs of men. As Colin Gray reminds us in *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, "War and warfare will always be with us: war is a permanent feature of the human condition."[16] Many of Gray's summarizing arguments in this text are familiar: war does not change

in nature, even though it manifests itself differently; war is driven most by political context, but is social, cultural, political, and strategic in behavior, and surprise is inherent to warfare.[17] However, the point of Gray's book was to counter in some part the prevailing notion following the attacks on 11 September 2001 that future warfare would be all irregular. "Irregular warfare may well be the dominant mode in belligerency for some years to come, but interstate war, including great power conflict, will enjoy a healthy future."[18]

Harry G. Summers, Jr., a past faculty member at the U.S. Army War College, in discussing the nature of warfare, liked to tell students "a guy with a sharp stick can still poke your eye out."[19] It was his way of reminding his audience that while new ideas were often added to war and the military's plate, few were ever removed. However, he was also suggesting that those who would practice sanitary "war" from the comfort of a computer station or "impose their will" through influence are not immune to sharp sticks or incoming missiles. Summers and Gray grasped the true complexity of the 21st century security environment confronting the American military. Hence, a third signpost is the U.S. military must be prepared to confront the historical spectrum of use of military force across the full Continuum of Military Operations as indicated in Figure 1.

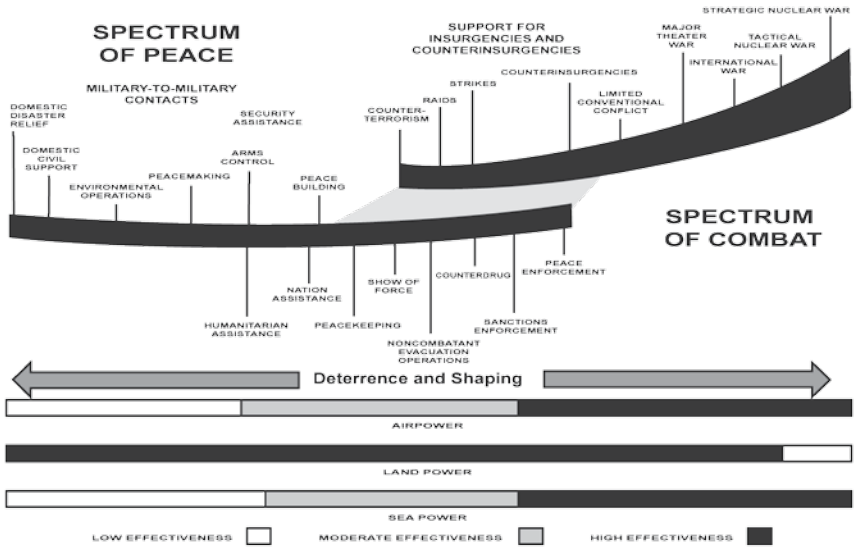

Figure 1. Continuum of Military Operations[20]

A fourth signpost marking the increased complexity of the security environment and portending danger is the diffusion of power within the domestic and international orders. One of the consequences of the interaction of modernity and globalization is the empowerment of other actors within the domestic and international systems. Relatively speaking, intergovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other national and transnational actors (professional, social, religious and terrorist organizations as well as individuals) exercise more power within the state and international systems than previously. This rise of relative power results from the combined effects of national and global populations' embracement of more universal values and the ability of many of these non-state actors to make better use of the changes resulting from globalization than governments who have yet to adapt.[21] U.S. democratic liberal-capitalist ideals lie at the heart of the universal values, the empowerment of individuals and populations, and the progress of globalization. In an ironic twist of the ascendency of these values, the 21st century security environment is one in which state sovereignty and state power may be more easily challenged and international instability increased.

The continuing changes and their implications are so significant that some, like John B. Alexander, argue the very nature of war has changed, and the nation-state may be a failing concept.

> … the nature of war has changed at a fundamental level—that of definition. Further, information technology is so pervasive and interpenetrating that its impact cannot be relegated to mere alteration in the techniques by which war is prosecuted. Rather, information technology facilitates new social structures, exacerbates competing hierarchical beliefs, and, combined with other factors, enhances the ability of powerful nations, or other philosophical organizations, to impose their will on adversaries. It is this ability for imposition of will, not the level of violence inflicted, that will determine whether or not a conflict has been won or lost.[22]

Dr. Alexander's arguments about a change in the "nature" of warfare are both useful and debatable, but his major conclusions about the implications for SOF are critical. For reasons discussed later, SOF will increasingly become a tool of choice, and SOF units must be prepared to morph into new capabilities in order to address more and more nontraditional challenges

in the ongoing quest for an enduring democratic liberal-capitalist political economic order.[23]

A Mini-Strategic Appraisal

The exact nature of the 21st century order is still emerging and will be shaped in large part by the choices in policies and strategies developed and acted on by the United States and its strategic partners—and how others react to them. The major trends acting on its emergence are easily identifiable and portrayed in numerous studies and reports. Chief among these are globalization with its subthemes of technology diffusion, free flow of information, interdependent and competitive economies, and relative empowerment of weak state, non-state, and individual actors. Globalization has been dealt with extensively elsewhere and most national security professionals are familiar with its attributes. It suffices here to say that "globalization continued" supported on a strong base of democratic liberal capitalism holds forth a promising future of positive economic competition and assured human security by expanding the economic pie and advancing universal human rights. This vision, founded in fundamental American values, faces severe challenges, many of which are accentuated by the very processes of globalization. The purpose of this section is to highlight the complexity of the evolving security environment and the potential implications for SOF.

Global Trends 2025, published by the National Intelligence Council in 2008, argues that the world is being transformed, and the next decade plus will be characterized more by change than continuities.[24] They are certainly right that the world is undergoing major changes and will continue to do so in a bumpy manner with many ups and downs. The attributes of globalization interacting with other ongoing trends is creating synergies with unprecedented opportunities and contradictory consequences, many of which do not bode well for the security of the United States and its strategic partners. Which are which is yet to be determined, but the potential issues are visible and they portend a period of instability and changes in the security environment.

For example, globalization is proceeding in an uneven manner with some prospering while others starve. The rewards of globalization are disproportionally shared among states and regions, and within states. Some of this is the result of starting with significant disadvantages in resources and

education or being unable to compete positively in the global marketplace as a result of inadequate governance and leadership. However, even individuals and states that seek to compete positively within the rule set of democratic liberal capitalism find themselves disadvantaged by those who are willing to flaunt the rule set that sustains globalization—rule of law, universal human rights, and positive competition in a free market where global security and stability is insured by all. The latter implies that security costs are shared in some manner and that efforts will be made to provide assistance to bring states into or back into globalization's prosperity and security. It suggests a necessary U.S. involvement in international security and assistance.

The state capitalism models currently pursued by China, Russia, and India are specific examples of where aspects of globalization's rule set are being flaunted. This may be a transitional period for these states as it was for South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, but it could also result in a competing predatory capitalist system in which the state unfairly manipulates the marketplace and its citizens to gain economic and ideological advantages contrary to U.S. interests. In addition, the adoption of the model by replicating states, retaliation by aggrieved competitors, or internal unrest due to a lack of perceived rights within these states all pose potential security issues for the United States and its partners.[25] All of these broaden the scope of the security responses needed by United States.

Demographics in the 21st century are largely a contradictory trend. The global population is growing, but the growth will continue to be disproportionate in underdeveloped and fragile states. With neither jobs nor promising futures existing, resorting to other means of livelihood and migration are logical options for disenchanted youth. Crime, insurgency, terrorism, repression, and increasing and counterproductive instability are the likely results. On the one hand, the instability may collapse corrupt or unrepresentative regimes and provide opportunities for the emergence of more positive states. On the other hand, as global terrorism has demonstrated, the attributes and consequences of instability are easily exportable to other places around the globe. Compounding the lack of opportunity at home, most gaining nations' immigration policies favor skilled professionals and the educated. Often, the ones most capable of building a prosperous state are the first to leave a failing state, making things even worse. Worsening conditions create illegal migration. Illegal and mass migrants are less likely to be assimilated into a gaining state and are fertile ground for criminal networks, social unrest, and

other harbingers of instability. At the same time, many developed nations' working populations will further decline as a result of declining birth rates and aging, creating economic issues at home as productivity and tax revenues drop and security and social programs compete for decreasing state resources.[26] As a result, more and more potential donor states will continue to accept the qualified immigrant and be unable or unwilling to accept or assist the struggling. Consequently, the United States and its strategic partners must find ways to assist troubled states to manage their own economic and security issues.

Economic growth is also contradictory. Despite recent economic setbacks, continued economic growth in the developed and developing world will place greater pressure on energy, food, and water resources. As more states enter the global competition, the pressure increases. The competition for resources could result in state-on-state conflicts or instability within states. Yet, it is also necessary that all states participate in this growth in order to meet the 21st century expectations of their populations for human security.[27] Governments that cannot provide human security will fail, creating the potential for conflict and humanitarian requirements for the international community. It is an area in which the United States must respond as a consequence of U.S. strategic values and in order to continue to lead and shape the world order.

The diffusion of power is another contradictory trend. Power is becoming more diffused. The rise of China, India, and others as well as the resurgence of Russia marks the advent of a more multipolar international system. While a more multipolar world is a logical and necessary outcome of globalization, the question is open to which rising states will be contributing strategic partner sharing power and which may seek to be spoilers to improve their relative power. In addition, multi-polarity, as well as the spread of technology, places more relative power into the hands of lesser states and increases the potential for conflict and instability. Like Iran, lesser states may interfere in the internal affairs of other states or threaten others' security while shielded by the tensions among larger states or the implied threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction. The relative power and influence of non-state actors—business, ethnic and religious groups, NGOs, and others—is also enhanced by many of the basic constructs of globalization, such as its technology, communications, interdependency, and openness. In the ongoing transformation, the wide diversity of non-state actors are crucial enablers

to bringing all states and populations into a positive 21st century order. However, non-state actors can also pursue destructive ends that contribute to disorder and instability. It is worth noting that other basic constructs of globalization, such as secularism and universal human rights, threaten some religious and social groups, governments, and other current elites. Globalization's constructs can be portrayed in a negative manner to serve threatened elites and empower political opportunists. Any of these can threaten stability and U.S. interests.[28] The United States must be prepared to deal constructively with a variety of non-state actors.

Global Trends 2025 further emphasizes the almost paradoxical nature of this transformation in noting that in resolving many of the issues created by these trends, a new problem set is created. For example, a transition away from dependence on fossil fuels might alleviate the competition for energy resources, but it would wreak havoc with those national economies dependent on oil production in the Middle East or that of Russia. Even here, the results are not predictably good or bad. They are both good and bad. Such a collapse and the threat of its consequences might force the new Russian elites toward a more representative government. What this portends is that the United States and its partners are confronted with a very complex and unpredictable security environment for the next 10-15 years, and perhaps beyond, until the promise of globalization can be more fully realized.[29]

The security environment is at a particularly vulnerable period when numerous factors are interacting and often in contradictory ways. At times like these the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of the strategic environment is much greater and anticipating the future is more difficult. Nonetheless, it is useful to consider the range of possible future outcomes. In doing this, policymakers and strategists gain insights in how to both shape and prepare for the future. The range is usually expressed in distinct outcomes for analysis purposes and clarity. Once expressed, the policies and strategies to shape events toward a more favorable future can be determined. Such a process focused on the 2025 world order might find the United States is confronted with several distinct potential security futures: (1) a breakdown of the international order into more or less greater chaos in which the remaining stable states struggle to maintain some sense of international order and trade to provide a degree of stability and prosperity for their citizens; (2) the rise of peer or near-peer competitors on a global or regional level and the strain of a new series of small conflicts and cold

wars that threaten stability and prosperity; (3) global or regional warfare on a large scale that threatens the existing order; (4) extended status quo; or (5) the continued evolution of the global order along democratic liberal-capitalist lines with new strategic partners contributing to and sharing in global stability and prosperity.

National security in its broader sense involves the use of all the nation's elements of power: economic, diplomatic, military, and socio-psychological to shape a favorable future.[30] From a policymaker or strategist's view, how the United States chooses to use, not use, or fails to use appropriately the instruments inherent to these elements in relation to what other actors do and chance will determine the shape of the future. Hence, while it is impossible to predict the future, understanding the potential factors at play and their possibilities does illuminate the range of security concerns and ways in which they can be addressed. Wildcards or "Black Swans"—totally unanticipated factors or events—can undermine such projections; but such wildcards are rare, if the analysis process' environmental scan is comprehensive.

The complexity of the emerging security environment has not been lost to those responsible for thinking about security challenges strategically. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report recognized the multiple challenges of irregular, catastrophic, traditional, and disruptive threats.[31] The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report also describes a "complex environment" with multiple, diverse challenges for U.S. forces and partners.[32] However, the primary missions assigned in the 2012 Defense Strategy make the diversity of the challenges posed by this complexity most evident. Given the extent of these challenges, it appears a question of not who gets what mission, but can it all be done if everyone works together?

The assigned missions of 2012 Defense Strategy are:[33]

- Counterterrorism and irregular warfare (IW).
- Deter and defeat aggression.
- Project power despite anti-access/area denial challenges.
- Counter weapons of mass destruction.
- Operate effectively in cyberspace and space.
- Maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent.
- Defend the homeland and provide support to civil authorities.
- Provide a stabilizing presence.
- Conduct stability and counterinsurgency operations.

- Conduct humanitarian, disaster relief, and other operations.

In the new Defense Strategy, the United States is struggling with two major defense changes. First, budget concerns and the need for domestic investment are resulting in major cuts in military spending. Second, the strategy is seeking to rebalance the U.S. security focus after more than a decade of post-9/11 warfare. While clearly recognizing the greater complexity of the security environment, the strategy is emphasizing the Pacific Rim and reinvestments in maritime and air power at the expense of land power. It clearly focuses on the rising potential of an unhealthy Chinese hegemony in that region and any ambition of China to become a global disruptor or peer competitor. The focus on the Pacific Rim reflects national economic concerns and foreign policy commitments as well as new security ones. It is a continuation of U.S. policy from the 1990s when the U.S. policymakers chose to seek to bring China into the global economic order. If the defense strategy is successful, China will continue its progress and enter into the U.S.-favored democratic liberal-capitalist world order as a full strategic partner.

It is clearly a hedging strategy, but one with a new balance in the joint paradigm calculated to help shape China toward a non-aggressive security strategy. Like all strategy, it has risks. In seeking to shape China's military policy through such U.S. force structure adjustments, it could lead Chinese leaders to conclude the United States is pursuing an anti-Chinese policy. However, U.S. policymakers have already likely concluded Chinese calculations are that the United States merely wants to demonstrate that any arms race or adventurism is impracticable and counterproductive. Risk is also being assumed in re-stationing, the reduction of Army and Marine forces, and the acceptance of the inability to conduct wars in two theaters. Such risk is particularly problematic for the Army and SOF because the Army and SOF as land power instruments have significant mission responsibilities across the spectrum of conflict. And, most of the propensity for instability is land centric.

The Pacific focus, accumulated cuts, changes in warfighting perspective, and the American public's focus on internal issues might suggest to some state and non-state actors the United States is no longer willing or cannot play a role as the world's major security guarantor. These actors may rationally conclude the United States is incapable of, or reluctant to, committing forces on the ground. Despite the obvious thought in how the new

balance was constructed, it represents a reduction in land force capability at a precarious time when land-based security issues in the rest of the world are increasing, regardless of any success in Afghanistan or Iraq. Again, the Defense Strategy hedges in this regard. First, notwithstanding the cuts, the strategy does maintain a balance that includes responsive, if reduced land power. The strategy also hedges by supporting proactive measures such as building partnership capacity to offset U.S. force shortfalls. Importantly, the strategy advocates robust SOF, providing potential policy options that can act proactively on the ground globally. Nonetheless, the potential challenges and the solutions proposed—particularly from a land force perspective—are daunting.

The Use of Power

States, through their possession of and ability to generate and integrate all the elements of power, remain the international environment's most versatile and potentially strongest actors. The apparent ineffectiveness and inefficiencies of governments notwithstanding, states can still acquire and integrate these elements collectively better than other actors can. Consequently, states are better suited to govern and make war. The community of states has waived some aspects of state sovereignty in order to promote mutual well-being, but this should not be confused with an inability of individual or collectives of states to act. As problematic as the Global War on Terror proved, it did demonstrate the power inherent in states and collective action. However, the advance of modernity in society and the changes brought on by globalization have also provided the conditions and the means for a broader array of non-state actors to co-flourish with state actors and extend their influence through the greater interconnectedness of globalism. You need to look no further than the global media to see how these non-state actors can complicate the state's use of power at home or abroad.

Power in the international system has always been relative. Each state and non-state actor has the capacity to act in regard to its interests, and each possesses some form of power or they would not exist as actors. Power is the means actors use to get the outcomes they desire. Power can be objective—the actual assets possessed—or subjective—what others believe exists. Power

Power can be objective—the actual assets possessed—or subjective—what others believe exists.

is exercised in various forms: brute force, coercion, inducement, persuasion, and attraction—hard and soft power. A particular actor's power is relative to the power possessed by others and the willingness to use it. Power can be tangible or intangible. Military forces represent tangible power, but the will to use them is intangible. Hence, power is physical, subjective, and dynamic. States and non-state actors gain and lose relative power and gain and lose credibility in the use of power. Consequently, the use of power is highly contextual. In this complex environment, the strategic circumstances define the appropriateness of the type of state power and its particular use. For military power, these circumstances include physical attributes, such as forces available, geography and enemy defenses, and non-physical attributes such as moral courage, questions of international legitimacy, and issues of national prestige and plausible deniability.[34]

The use of power can be paradoxical. For example, large forces in being would appear to be useful as a deterrent to potential adversaries. Yet, the creation of such forces may lead an adversary to build similar levels of forces and create an arms race; or it may increase risks of conflict or result in policy paralysis.[35] As President John F. Kennedy discovered, the national reliance on nuclear weapons as a singular military policy instrument and strategic deterrent against Soviet aggression became impractical once the Soviets developed intercontinental delivery systems. The consequences of massive retaliation made it an illogical policy option or deterrent to anything but a nuclear attack on the homeland. While they remained an essential deterrent to a nuclear attack, Kennedy needed other viable military policy options to counter lesser aggression. As a result, the strategy of flexible response tailored the strategic nuclear response for flexibility with the Triad to assure a nuclear response. At the same time, it created additional conventional and unconventional capabilities that could be used across a range of circumstances without necessarily escalating to all-out war or nuclear destruction. Modern U.S. Army Special Forces re-emerged during this period as a capability to support this strategy.

In a similar manner, the current global order, with its multitude of challenges and its empowered actors and democratic liberal-capitalist driven rule set, calls for a range of military options to confront an increasingly complex security environment. Since the end of the Cold War, policymakers have found SOF have a particular strategic utility in this security environment for policy options that require special military operations, use a small

footprint, provide for plausible deniability when needed, and are not representative of a national commitment. Policymakers have increasingly relied on SOF to provide practical policy options for protecting or advancing national interests.[36] SOF's strategic performance represents a discernible and distinct form of military power—SOF power. As such, SOF power, like land, sea, and air power, is employable as a distinct instrument of power or as an integrated part of national military power and joint warfare.

SOF's strategic performance represents a discernible and distinct form of military power—SOF power.

Thus, in the 21st century, the United States is again confronted with a strategic quandary of immense proportions. Globalization has changed the world we helped shape in the 20th century. It has empowered individuals and non-state actors, raised the expectations of the world's populations, and created the potential for the rise of new near-peer competitors at the regional and global levels. At the same time, "globalization" has yet to realize its full promise and the better future for all, as our predecessors foresaw it, has yet to materialize. In fact, such a bright future is at risk, hanging in the balance as the United States and its strategic partners attempt to shape the global environment along a democratic liberal-capitalist path. Consequently, the 21st century promises to be no more peaceful than previous centuries and the question that military professionals and America's policymakers must consider is how best to protect and advance U.S. economic and geopolitical interests. If history is any guide, conventional military power will not lessen in importance even as the new century requires diverse and even novel applications of military power. In the plausible scenarios of the new century, SOF play a critical role—no more so than conventional forces,[37] but nonetheless pivotal in providing military options for policymakers that can shape the international environment below the threshold of major combat. Such a role requires that the nature—and hence the potential—of SOF power and how it fits into the broader context of political and military policy be better understood.

3. Finding Definitions

Clear definitions are crucial to understanding an American military theory of special operations for several significant reasons. First, special operations are not unique to the American military. Various government agencies within the United States at the national, state, and local levels conduct "special operations" that include numerous and disparate activities and sometimes require dedicated special operators, such as SWAT teams in law enforcement. Other nations also have similar activities and label them as special operations. Their militaries often have a divergent view of what constitutes military special operations and the purpose and role of SOF. Part of the argument herein is that there is a specific American military special operations theory. While it may share some attributes with others, it is a part of the American strategic culture and therefore distinctly shaped by American perspectives of the military and the use of power. These distinctions are important. Second, unlike modern maritime and airpower theory, which seemingly sprang more or less fully developed into the 20th century from the intellects of Alfred Thayer Mahan, Sir Julian Corbett, Giulio Douhet, William "Billy" Mitchell, and others, a special operations theory is ensuing from a slow and painful birth process. Policymakers, conventional military leaders, and the SOF community are still finding their way in understanding and making the best use of SOF. Nowhere is this more evident than in the evolution of the definitions associated with special operations. Finally, despite wide usage, confusion still exists concerning exactly what definitions refer to and how they interrelate.

In the 1970s special operations were defined as: "Secondary or supporting operations which may be adjunct to various other operations and for which no one service is assigned primary responsibility."[38] This definition left "special operations" applicable to any service or organization and did not reflect the emergence of permanent SOF, or recognize such operations could achieve primary policy and military objectives. In 1983, at a conference on "The Role of Special Operations in US Strategy for the 1980s," Brigadier General Joseph C. Lutz noted that before the staffing process changed the definition in 1979 his command recommended the above definition be changed to:

> … overt, covert, and clandestine operations, and mentioned specialized techniques employed by small, specially trained and configured formations capable of independent operations where the use of general purpose forces [conventional forces] is either inappropriate or infeasible.[39]

When the change emerged from the staffing process in 1979, the official Department of Defense (DOD) definition of special operations was:

> Military operations conducted by specially trained, equipped, and organized DOD forces against strategic or tactical targets in pursuit of national military, political, economic or psychological objectives. They may support conventional operations, or they may be prosecuted independently when the use of conventional forces is either inappropriate or infeasible. Sensitive peacetime operations, except for training, are normally authorized by the National Command Authorities (NCA) and conducted under the direction of the NCA or designated commander. Special operations may include unconventional warfare, counterterrorist operations, collective security, psychological operations, and civil affairs measures.[40]

This definition somewhat skirts the issue of who may do special operations by avoiding the term SOF and presumably allowing commanders to continue to conduct special operations with highly-trained conventional forces.

In the 1983 conference on SOF roles, Drs. Maurice Tugwell and David Charters offered a broad and inclusive, but more concise definition of special operations:

> Small-scale, clandestine, covert or overt operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk nature, undertaken to achieve significant political or military objectives in support of foreign policy. Special operations are characterized by either simplicity or complexity, by subtlety and imagination, by the discriminate use of violence, and by oversight at the highest level. Military and nonmilitary resources, including intelligence assets, may be used in concert.[41]

Today the DOD dictionary definition is:

> (DOD) Operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk. Also called SO.[42]

Each of these definitions helps define special operations as they have emerged in American military practice and doctrine over the last 40 years. However, ambiguity remains and none are quite adequate for a special operations theory. A large part of the ambiguity can be resolved by simply accepting that only SOF conduct special operations as the U.S. military defines them. From this perspective, conventional forces may be called upon to conduct special missions that require unique preparation and arrangements, but "special operations" involve SOF. The ambiguity can also simply be ignored as such things often are in seeking consensus in the military. For example, the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and SOF conduct air operations. The term "air operations" does not appear in the DOD dictionary, and joint and service doctrine explains it for their specific purposes. However, a special operations theory requires a suitable and conclusive definition to assist in understanding the theory. From the perspective of an American theory, a useful definition is:

> Military operations conducted by Special Operations Forces. Special operations are overt, covert, and clandestine operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk nature, undertaken to achieve or support significant political or military objectives in support of national security and foreign policy. Such operations range across the spectrum of conflict from peace to war and make use of unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment, and training. They are often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments where the use of conventional forces is either inappropriate or infeasible. They are characterized by one or more of the following: subtlety and imagination in planning and execution, time and political sensitivity, low visibility, support of indigenous forces, discriminate use of violence, need for regional expertise, oversight at the highest levels, and a high degree of risk. Special operations may support or be supported by conventional operations,

> or they may be prosecuted independently. Military and nonmilitary resources, including intelligence assets, may be used in concert or as enablers. Special operations doctrinal missions evolve with the changing context of the strategic environment, the needs of national security, and roles and missions of conventional forces.

SOF also need to be defined in order to support a theory of special operations. Surprisingly, while the definition of special operations has remained somewhat ambiguous, the DOD dictionary defines SOF more distinctly:

> Those Active and Reserve Component forces of the Military Services designated by the Secretary of Defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations.[43]

This definition is succinct and makes clear what is unique about the designation, preparation, and use of SOF. However, for theory's purposes some elaboration is useful:

> A strategic asset of Active and Reserve Component forces of the military services designated by the secretary of defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations. They are characterized by selectivity in personnel, atypically configured and equipped organizations and formations, specialized competencies and skill sets, and extraordinary training and education.

As can be seen by the two definitions offered here, in an American theory of military special operations, special operations and SOF are inseparable—to say one is to infer the other.

Special Operations Forces is an inclusive term for all those organizations designated by the secretary of defense as a part of that force. However, the organizations can vary in type over time and perform differing missions under the rubric of special operations. Consequently, the specialized competencies and skill sets of the personnel and the types of missions of the organizations vary. SOF organizations are defined as:

> USSOCOM and the commands and units designated by the secretary of defense as members of SOF. SOF organizations may consist of special operators; distinctive DOD capabilities, such as civil affairs and psychological operations; and various administrative, staff, and

> support personnel. They are often organized in non-standard structures and make use of unique and specialized technology, equipment, and doctrine. They may be augmented by enablers who provide additional administrative and logistical support. SOF organizations are further characterized by multiple command, operational, and support relationships with USSOCOM, other combatant commands, and the services.

Among the various professionals who make up SOF, one type in particular needs to be defined as unique—the special operator. Spulak identifies these as SOF elite or "selected" warriors, "specially recruited, assessed, selected, trained, and equipped" with specific attributes and personal values that exceed the norm of other military personnel with a particular emphasis on creativity and flexibility.[44] A special operator can be defined as:

> The elite warrior at the epicenter of special operations—the point of the spear—who is specifically selected, educated, trained, and employed for the perilous missions of special operations. Special operators vary by service and mission focus, but share a common warrior ethos and espouse a set of values that permeates and defines SOF culture.

SOF is inherently joint because its personnel and organizations come from all the different services. However, it is also joint and interagency oriented because of essential relationships needed for successful special operations. SOF maintain a lean force structure and posture by their reliance on the capabilities of the military services and others to "enable" special operations. SOF recognize this dependence by crediting its enablers, which are defined as:

> Other personnel, units, and activities that are not designated members of SOF or USSOCOM force structure, but who use their skills, competencies, and capabilities to enable and support SOF personnel and operations. Enablers may be military, government agency, or contracted and non-contracted civilian personnel and activities.

The evolution of special operations and SOF over the last three decades within the military suffices to justify changes in general military and war fighting theory. However, these changes have been accompanied by a growing

realization among policymakers, the military, and others that because of the broad interconnected political, economic, military, and socio-psychological changes in the security environment following the collapse of the Cold War security paradigm, SOF, like the other military services, generate a distinct and useful type of military power. Ross S. Kelly, in *Special Operations and National Purpose* (1989), captures the essence of this thinking in describing why special operations and why SOF:

> Special operations in the generic sense address a spectrum of challenges not normally considered appropriate for regular armed military or national forces. … In all cases, special operations constitute specific missions or tasks, involving individual risks, to meet specific situations that threaten national interests but that do not warrant commitment of general purpose forces [conventional forces]. They may also support conventional military operations, in which case they provide a means of circumventing enemy strengths to attack weaknesses, stimulating popular resistance and chaos in rear areas and providing otherwise unattainable intelligence. But they are also available for circumstances requiring military skills in peacetime, when declarations of war are undesirable or when there is concern that introduction of conventional force operations may exacerbate a crisis.[45] SOF are therefore established and maintained by nations that have identified a requirement to be able to implement a range of specialized military and paramilitary policy options without being forced to resort to the use of conventional units.[46]

Today it is possible to speak of SOF power as a distinct instrument of military power and it can be defined as:

> The capacity to implement a range of specialized military and paramilitary policy options to address a spectrum of challenges not usually, or for specific reasons, considered appropriate for conventional military forces or other instruments of national power. SOF power supports national security and foreign policy objectives through military operations that influence the political, military, economic, and socio-psychological realms of state, regional, and global environments. SOF power is applicable across the spectrum of conflict and is exercised by designated SOF specifically chosen and prepared to

> conduct special operations. SOF power may be applied singularly, uniquely, or particularly, and may be more effective when used in conjunction with other instruments of national power. Other instruments, such as diplomacy, intelligence activities, economic assistance, or conventional military, may be supported by, act in concert with, or directly support SOF power.[47]

The DOD, joint doctrine, and service doctrine require definitions that serve their purposes of explanation and understanding in a real world of budget wrangling, cultural differences, cooperative action, and war fighting. Often in staffing, only the least controversial definitions escape the staffer's pen. In the actual war fighting, the warriors interpret the definitions and doctrine in accordance with the realities on the ground as they find them. Theory's definitions must also adhere to such ground truth as it finds it in the intellectual realm and in experience. The above definitions may differ from policy or doctrine, but they do conform to logic and practice. They provide common points of reference in articulating a theory of special operations. Key to an American theory is that in the emerging American approach, special operations and SOF are inseparable and the conceptualization of SOF power is a distinct instrument of national security.

4. Perspectives on Special Operations and SOF

> … special operations "are not just ordinary military operations writ small; they are qualitatively different."– Edward Luttwak[48]

American special operations achieve their effects through how they interact within the strategic, operational, and tactical environments. Special operations may include lethal and non-lethal, or integrated lethal and nonlethal activities, but the exceptionality of the SOF power contribution is its method and means of interaction. Special operations are the method and SOF are the means. Although SOF may operate in the domains of other services—air, land, and sea, and across or in the seams and gaps among these domains—it is qualitatively different than the contributions of the other military services just as the military element of power differs qualitatively from the economic or political elements.[49] This is not to suggest that SOF are better than other military instruments, but rather to accentuate that the qualities they possess and the capabilities they represent provide another discrete instrument within the American military element of power. The SOF community continues to struggle internally and externally with articulating these qualitative differences, trapped between sounding elitist and being seen as an ancillary to the services. Organizational parochial interests notwithstanding, the differences are important for theory and practice because they explain how special operations and SOF achieve effects. A number of people have undertaken explaining these qualitative differences and the implications.

Theories and Constructs

McRaven, writing in 1995 from his analysis of eight special operations case studies and personal experience as a special operator, offered a theory of special operations warfare in which he argues relative superiority is the central concept for success. For McRaven, in the broader context of theory of war, the ability to overcome Clausewitz' friction is the key to relative superiority:

> I will show that through the use of certain principles of warfare a special operations force can reduce what Carl von Clausewitz calls the frictions of war to a manageable level. By minimizing these frictions the special operations force can achieve relative superiority over the enemy. Once relative superiority is achieved, the attacking force is no longer at a disadvantage and has the initiative to exploit the enemy's weaknesses and secure victory.[50]

In his study of special operations, McRaven concluded relative superiority consists of three basic properties. First, "Relative superiority favors small forces" because "Large forces are more susceptible to friction."[51] Second, it is achieved at the pivotal point in an engagement and once achieved, it must be sustained in order to be successful. The latter requires courage, intellect, boldness, and perseverance. And third, if lost, relative superiority is difficult to reestablish. It is achieved, he argues, through the adherence to six principles, which are interdependent and synergistic, in environments—places, conditions, and times—favorable to special operations. The proper consideration and integration of the six principles within and across the three phases of an operation—planning, preparation, and execution—generate relative superiority. While the principles of war apply to all forces, these focus on special operations. McRaven acknowledges his theory is focused on direct action missions, which he describes as tactical missions of a strategic or operational nature.[52] The six principles he derived are:

1. **Simplicity.** Simplicity is achieved by limiting the number of tactical objectives to only those that are vital; good intelligence to limit the unknown factors and number of variables that must be considered; and innovations in equipment and tactics to overcome obstacles that might complicate surprise and speed.
2. **Security.** Security is achieved by denying the enemy of any unexpected advantage from foreknowledge of an attack. It is often more a denial of knowledge of timing and methods as opposed to the possibility of an attack.
3. **Repetition.** Repetition is achieved through practice and rehearsal. It hones individual skills and reveals weaknesses in the planning.
4. **Surprise.** Surprise is achieved by catching the enemy off guard through deception, timing, and taking advantage of his vulnerabilities.

5. **Speed.** Speed is achieved by getting to the objective as fast as possible in order to limit your vulnerability and enhance the opportunity to achieve relative superiority.
6. **Purpose.** Purpose is achieved by inculcating an understanding of the prime objective of the mission and a personal commitment to its accomplishment in each member of the attacking force.[53]

McRaven concluded special operations work best with "a simple plan, carefully concealed, repeatedly and realistically rehearsed, and executed with surprise, speed, and purpose."[54] "The principles of special operations work because they seek to reduce warfare to its simplest level and thereby limit the [opportunities for the] negative effects of chance, uncertainty, and the enemy's will."[55] McRaven's theory is valid for its purpose, but insufficient as a unified theory of special operations because its primary focus is limited to direct action missions. Nonetheless, since all policy and strategy is ultimately implemented by tactical action—someone physically doing something—his insights and conclusions inform a broader and more unifying theory of special operations.

Others have examined how SOF achieve effects. Lieutenant General Samuel Wilson, U.S. Army (retired), summarized his thinking as a set of principles and characteristics: surprise, effective intelligence, speed, mobility, timing, coordinated teamwork, security (ability to protect secrets and to achieve cover and deception at all levels), maximum delegation of authority and streamlined chain of command, elite forces (capable of extraordinary performance) with multiple capabilities (inherently joint in nature), and special weapons and equipment (nonstandard variety).[56] His conclusions further inform theory.

Writing in 2007 with USSOCOM a primary actor in the War on Terrorism, Spulak sought to build on McRaven's work and develop a more general theory of special operations. He stated his theory as:

> A theory of special operations: Special operations are missions to accomplish strategic objectives where the use of conventional forces would create unacceptable risks due to Clausewitzian friction. Overcoming these risks requires special operations forces that directly address the ultimate sources of friction through qualities that are the result of the distribution of the attributes of SOF personnel.[57]

His subtitle, "the Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF," signals the fact that much of the monograph is focused on understanding the nature of SOF. However, he makes significant contributions to a unified theory. Spulak nests special operations theory soundly in larger theories of war and conflict, but like others believes special operations "are not just ordinary military operations writ small; they are *qualitatively* different."[58] Based on his analysis of the war and conflict theories, Spulak adopts Michael Mazarr's distinctions among the character of battle, the form of warfare, and the nature of conflict to explain the value of special operations. In Mazarr's model, the character of battle is the conceptual arena in which opposing forces clash. It is the meeting point of armed forces and is characterized by violence, blood, physical and moral courage, and will power. These attributes create the enduring nature of war—the struggle to destroy one another. The form of warfare is the tactical and operational art—the organization, technology, and doctrine. Form changes as necessary in response to the value of the reasons for conflict and the interaction of the parties involved. The nature of conflict is determined by the causes and character of a dispute within the international system. Disputes may arise from political, military, and socioeconomic reasons and generate the context for warfare as well as the application of other instruments and stratagem of power, such as bargaining, coercive diplomacy, power balancing, mediation, deception, and other tools and gambits short of open warfare. Any conflict in the international arena inherently possesses the potential for deadly interaction. In any interaction in the strategic arena of conflict, opponents are striving to be able to destroy the other and impose their will. Yet, military commanders are always limited by an enduring conundrum of how to achieve a position from which to destroy the enemy without risking destruction of their own forces. This conundrum and the enduring character of battle pose what Clausewitz termed "friction"—the cumulative political, moral, physical, and arbitrary reasons for why war can never achieve an ideal form.[59]

The need to take friction into account and the risks it poses largely determine the structure and practices, and consequently, the limitations of conventional forces. Assurance of both successfully imposing your will and surviving dictate an emphasis on deliberate planning, massing of forces, rigid doctrine, and unity of command in order to achieve sufficient predictability and certainty. However, this is done at the expense of creating a greater degree of organizational inertia and the loss of flexibility to exploit evolving

opportunities. Yet, Spulak argues history tells us: "During wartime, special men emerge who have the personal capability to overcome risk and the skills that allow them to perform strategically important tasks (when organized into special and small units) that conventional forces cannot."[60] SOF are about institutionalizing this capability. Spulak demonstrates that while SOF are not immune to friction, the SOF selection procedures coupled with self-selection, unique training, and nurturing within a SOF culture yield a tighter distribution of personnel with physical, mental, and psychological attributes favorable to special operations.[61] From this selectivity, SOF organizations emerge with a combination of three qualities distinct from other regular and elite forces and define SOF independent of missions and tasks:

- Warriors—SOF are engaged directly in the fundamental nature of war and the implementation of strategy, destroying the enemy, or creating his fear that he will be destroyed.
- Creative—SOF can immediately change the combat process, altering the way in which the tension is accommodated between threatening or performing destruction and avoiding it.
- Flexible—SOF units have a much larger range of capabilities and are more independent of other military forces than conventional units.[62]

These qualities allow SOF to overcome friction and be successful in missions in ways that conventional forces are not manned, structured, trained, expected, or called upon to undertake. SOF have their own limitations in regard to friction, and in these conditions conventional forces are better suited. Further, Spulak argues the SOF qualities define what roles SOF are best suited for and are the basis of the extension of military roles for SOF in the realms of other national elements of power.[63] Spulak's rich monograph offers much more than discussed here, but for the purposes of theoretically understanding how SOF achieve effects through special operations, his contribution ends with five operational characteristics that he considers generally unique to SOF:

- *Relative superiority* is the ability of small special operations units to gain a temporary decisive advantage, even over a larger or well-defended enemy force.

- *Certain access* is the ability to rapidly and securely transport, insert, and extract SOF, typically undetected, allowing operations in areas where or when conventional military operations are not possible.
- *Unconventional operations* is the ability to directly alter the way in which the tension between threatening and avoiding destruction is managed to conduct operations—for example, operating autonomously and independently, establishing and utilizing the capabilities of foreign military and paramilitary forces, sabotage, and subversion.
- *Integrated operations* is the ability to address transnational and asymmetric threats by integrating elements of national power and operating with other military forces and nonmilitary agencies.
- *Strategic initiative* is the ability to create and maintain initiative against an enemy at the strategic level by an orchestrated campaign of engaging carefully selected objectives unavailable to conventional forces.[64]

Another individual contributing important insights into how SOF are distinctive and achieve effects is Jessica Glicken Turnley, Ph.D. Turnley's background in organizational behavior, organizational culture, and anthropology bring a somewhat different but confirming and expanded perspective to an understanding of special operations and SOF. In a 2011 JSOU monograph, *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups: Why SOF are the way SOF are*, she examines the issues of SOF as forward-deployed "Warrior diplomats" and the centrality of small groups. Noting states tend to institutionally separate war and diplomacy, she observes that in theory the United States DOD does war and the Department of State does diplomacy. In practice, as the United States pursues its aims, the lines between war and diplomacy are actually less distinct and war and diplomacy are better viewed as a continuum. This should come as no surprise as states often use coercive diplomacy and diplomats negotiate the political victory of a successful war. The tool of the warrior is force, which changes behavior. The tools of diplomacy are persuasion and negotiation, which seek to change minds, and thus behavior. However, in irregular warfare she argues success is contingent on winning over the population and requires the competencies of both, and often combinations of the two.[65] In these environments,

> … the nature of diplomacy changes. The discourse does not take place among citizens of a globalized community who may be more like each other in many ways than they are like their local constituents. The language becomes one not of demarches and treaties and agreements between states, but a local language of security, food, and life and death negotiated among players on a local stage. Time frames are immediate. Negotiators are from the local population, and representatives of the foreign government are those personnel present in local venues, not in capital cities. Often these are military personnel, particularly if the situation is one which has already erupted in violence or has the potential to do so.[66]

This is a lesson that conventional forces have recently relearned in Iraq and Afghanistan, but Turnley's argument is that SOF are particularly well-suited for this environment for a reason. Good diplomacy on either the state or local level requires "the exercise of competencies in cross-cultural interaction and communication" and the good diplomat "is able to persuasively engage with populations who apply different sense-making strategies … [who have] profoundly different frames of references—populations that have different cultures."[67] Culture, she argues, is "not a thing but an ever-evolving set of sense-making strategies or frames of reference."[68] Cultural skills are approached in two ways. Teaching culture specific or regional knowledge equips an individual to behave appropriately in a specific culture. However, developing cross-cultural competency creates an ability to learn and adapt quickly so as to be able to operate well in any culture. The former is tactical knowledge to operate in a specific environment; the latter is a strategic skill that allows one to operate tactically in any environment. Conventional force soldiers learn the former to some level and the latter as exceptions, but SOF select for and develop cross-culture competency as a part of their inherent capability—creating a Warrior diplomat. The construct of Warrior diplomat explains SOF's capability to provide both kinetic and non-kinetic means to achieve strategic objectives, the latter providing the ability to work by, with, and through indigenous populations and others.[69]

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Following McRaven's and Spulak's lead, Turnley also concludes SOF are able to overcome friction in ways in which conventional forces cannot. While the argument is complex, the conclusion can be stated succinctly. In theory, conventional forces are organized as a bureaucracy to control the large numbers of people and resources necessary to achieve mass to overcome the enemy. Success in the conventional forces is achieved through functional differentiation—infantry, armor, artillery, logistics, et cetera—and discipline. Functionalization and discipline together create conformity in and predictability of performance (behaviors), which can be leveraged to overcome friction through planning and leadership at higher levels. They create a high degree of certainty to deal with the uncertainties of battle. Conventional forces develop organizational control at the behavior level because success depends on task performance and larger aims are successively broken down into functional tasks for different organizations, subunits, and individuals. The focus is on certainty of task performance so the whole of the coordinated effort by massed forces can occur.[70] It is an effective model for what large forces must do.

SOF evolved from a different model, one which historical experience shows can do some things better than the conventional force bureaucratic model—and conversely not do other things as well. In theory SOF organize into groups of broadly capable men, such as the "A" team. The division of labor is low and cohesion is built around the team's purpose. Teams are relatively self-sufficient and flexibility and creativity are the means of overcoming friction. In this team-oriented SOF structure, organizational thinking and planning start with context (purpose, mission, and environment) and needed behaviors are collectively developed for the context as opposed to developing behaviors to support a function.[71]

> SOF and GPF [general purpose forces - conventional forces] units differ fundamentally in the nature of their tasks, the nature of the men who compose the units, and the consequent ways in which solidarity or cohesion develops in operational groups. These differences in development lead to differences in performance and ultimately differences in the ways in which the two forces counter friction.[72]

In another insightful monograph, Turnley examines what makes SOF "special." She makes a clear distinction between SOF operators and others assigned to USSOCOM and places significance on the fact SOF operators are

actually members of four different services. In a cautionary note, she argues the dilution of the special operator identity within SOF, the increasingly bureaucratic nature of USSOCOM, and historical hostility of the conventional forces make SOF a precarious organization—one at risk of losing its crucial identity and importance in military theory. Her conclusions support Spulak on the centrality of people to any special operations theory. The concentration through selection of personnel with character traits favorable to special operations and self-insulation devices, such as arduous training and weeding out found in the Army Special Forces Q-Course or the Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training, she argues, produces unique warriors and teams. As a result, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts—SOF power. In her judgment, it is this unique human capability SOF ultimately bring to the U.S. military element of power.[73]

> In short, it is the people who make SOF special, not their missions, equipment, or training. Although the absence of special missions would eliminate the need for special men, the hallmark of SOF are the operators, not their tasks. It is these operator qualities—the specialness of the people—that allow SOF to do things that other military components could not do, were not allowed to do, or would not do. The quality and caliber of its personnel thus are a core value of SOF. This value is captured in the SOF truth: "People are more important than hardware."[74]

Truths, Doctrines, and Other Things SOF

The above authors bring thoughtful and important perspectives to the search for a unifying theory of American special operations and contribute to a school of thought. However, SOF culture has also embraced constructs of a potential theory through years of experience and doctrine exploration. Cultural knowledge and experience are expressed in part in what a community says about itself and how it says it. Cultural knowledge and experience can be found in a range of SOF artifacts such as mottos, sayings, self-descriptions, and military doctrine. These also provide insights for consideration. Among the best known of these are the SOF Truths, which encapsulate what USSOCOM commanders and their subordinates have come to believe are baselines in leading and managing SOF. Originally penned by

Colonel (retired) John Collins in 1987, he stated they were derived from the SOF Imperatives and his understanding of SOF. Initially, the fifth was not adopted because the community did not want to admit to its dependence on others. Admiral Eric T. Olson, former commander of USSOCOM, later embraced it.[75]

SOF Truths

- Humans are more important than hardware.
- Quality is better than quantity.
- SOF cannot be mass produced.
- Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur.
- Most special operations require non-SOF support.[76]

In later validating all five of the truths, Admiral Olson confirmed important aspects of a theory:

> The SOF Truths have provided time-tested guidance to the special operations community for daily activities as well as long-range planning. When they were originally penned, there was a fifth truth that was never published —'Most special operations require non-SOF assistance.' It's being included now so that we all understand the importance of force enablers and the contributions they make to mission success. To think otherwise would levy unrealistic expectations as to the capabilities SOF bring to the fight.[77]

The SOF Imperatives also reveal much about what the SOF community thinks is important to successful special operations.

SOF Imperatives

- Understand the operational environment.
- Recognize political implications.
- Facilitate interagency activities.
- Engage the threat discriminately.
- Consider long-term effects.
- Ensure legitimacy and credibility of special operations.
- Anticipate and control psychological effects.
- Apply capabilities indirectly.
- Develop multiple options.

- Ensure long-term sustainment.
- Provide sufficient intelligence.
- Balance security and synchronization.[78]

SOF core values are another area in which SOF distinctness is evident. All of the services espouse values that they believe will provide a basis for the individual's and the unit's character, decision making, and performance. Values serve as framework for planning when doctrine is inadequate for the circumstances encountered or action when plans go awry. Values express what service cultures believe are essential or core to their being. For example, the U.S. Army values are: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. The U.S. Air Force core values are: Integrity First, Service before Self, and Excellence in All We Do. The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps embrace: Honor, Courage, and Commitment. The core values SOF have adopted are: Integrity, Courage, Creativity, and Competence.[79] All of the services' values are appropriate and speak to all in the military profession, but the last two core values of SOF show a different emphasis from the other services that is particularly representative of SOF culture and what might be integral to a special operations theory.

Another important source of insights to a unifying theory is found in doctrine. In a general sense, doctrine is a statement about what military forces are required or expected to do and how they should go about doing it. It captures both the wisdom of the past and current thinking, seeking to guide the choices and practices of units and individuals. Doctrine is informed by theory, but it is also true that doctrine might inform theory. Much of doctrine is tactical and detailed, but often it is also self-reflective. How it codifies the missions and the conditions for those missions provides insights into potential theory. Joint Doctrine in regard to SOF, particularly *Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, Special Operations* (18 April 2011), for which USSOCOM is the proponent, offers such insight in its presentation of special operations and listing of mission criteria and core activities for SOF. In it, Olson, then commander of USSOCOM, stated, "This publication has captured our best characterization yet of the functions, organization, employment, and synchronization of Special Operations Forces."[80] It also provides a concise source of prevailing and underlying thinking.

In regard to where special operations and therefore SOF fit into the greater military theory, JP 3-05 states:

> SO [Special Operations] are conducted in all environments, but are particularly well suited for denied and politically sensitive environments. SO can be tailored to achieve not only military objectives through application of SOF capabilities for which there are no broad conventional force requirements, but also to support the application of the diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of national power. SO are typically low visibility or clandestine operations. SO are applicable across the range of military operations. They can be conducted independently or in conjunction with operations of conventional forces (CF) or other government agencies (OGAs), or host nations (HNs)/partner nations (PNs), and may include operations with or through indigenous, insurgent, and/or irregular forces. SO differ from conventional operations in degree of physical and political risk, operational techniques, modes of employment, and dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets.[81]

The SOF community has been an advocate and proponent for IW for a number of years. In the SOF strategic and theoretical thinking, IW is perceived as the arena where they can make the greatest contribution and have the greatest strategic value. In taking ownership of IW, *JP 3-05* describes it as:

> IW encompasses a level of conflict that is less than traditional warfare and involves an adversary seeking to disrupt or negate the military capabilities and advantages of a more powerful, conventionally armed military force, often representing the regime of a nation. However, the strategic objectives of IW are no less significant than those of traditional warfare. Unlike the force-on-force orientation of traditional warfare, IW focuses on the strategic purpose of gaining and maintaining control or influence over, and the support of a relevant population through political, psychological, and economic methods. IW requires a different mindset and different capabilities than those focused on the conventional military defeat of an adversary. The SOF mindset and capabilities make them particularly well suited for all forms of IW. Further, SOF capabilities complement those of CF [conventional forces], whom the Department of Defense (DOD) also has tasked with gaining a core competency in IW.[82]

The doctrine also presents what the community believes is the characteristics of SOF. It states that SOF are "inherently joint" because of their training, equipment, and special preparation that allows them to integrate special operations seamlessly into joint operations. It also makes an argument under "inherently joint" that SOF routinely operate in the interagency, international, and comprehensive domains in which nonmilitary actors dominate. Such operations justify selectivity of personnel and special training, education, and equipment. SOF are also "distinct from conventional forces." Under this rubric, the doctrine notes the selection process and extraordinary training, which makes rapid replacement and regeneration problematic. It also notes the maturity, experience, and qualifications of SOF personnel as compared to conventional units. In addition, the extensive language and cross-cultural training are highlighted as part of the distinctness.[83] As a result, SOF bring versatile, flexible teams into the operating environment capable of operating in ambiguous and swiftly changing situations that can:

- Be task-organized quickly and deployed rapidly to provide tailored responses to many different situations.
- Gain access to hostile or denied areas.
- Provide limited medical support for themselves and those they support.
- Communicate worldwide with organic equipment.
- Conduct operations in austere, harsh environments without extensive support.
- Survey and assess local situations and report these assessments rapidly.
- Work closely with regional military and civilian authorities and populations.
- Organize people into working teams to help solve local problems.
- Deploy with a generally lower profile and less intrusive presence than conventional forces.
- Provide unconventional options for addressing ambiguous situations.[84]

The doctrine also considers the qualifications and limitations that might apply to the use of SOF. It identifies mission criteria as guidance to commanders for when it is appropriate to employ SOF—or suggest when it might be inappropriate.

- Must be an appropriate SOF mission or activity.
- Mission or tasks should support the joint force commander's campaign, operation plan, or special activities.
- Missions or tasks must be operationally feasible, approved, and fully coordinated.
- Required resources must be available to execute and support the SOF mission.
- The expected outcome of the mission must justify the risks.[85]

It also identifies "SOF Limitations" that are representative of the community's concerns over the mal-utilization or needless expenditure of SOF assets and a recognition of SOF's reliance on the others for support.

- SOF cannot be quickly replaced or reconstituted nor can their capabilities be rapidly expanded. Improper employment of SOF (e.g., in purely conventional roles or on inappropriate or inordinately high-risk missions) runs the risk of rapidly depleting these resources.
- SOF are not a substitute for conventional forces. In most cases SOF are neither trained, organized, nor equipped to conduct sustained conventional combat operations and, therefore, should not be substituted for conventional forces that are able to effectively execute that mission.
- Most special operations missions require non-SOF support. SOF are typically provided to geographic combatant commands (GCCs) and are not structured with robust means of logistic and sustainment capabilities. SOF must rely on the supported GCC's service component commands for most support except for those SOF-unique assets that are required to be supplied by USSOCOM.[86]

Guiding, and in some cases responding to that "understanding" of special operations and SOF in doctrine, DOD Directive 5100.01 lists special operations activities. These represent what the SOF community and DOD believe constitute *current jurisdictions* of special operations. All are not exclusively SOF particular and the services also have roles and missions requirements related to some.

- **Counterterrorism**: Actions taken directly against terrorist networks and indirectly to influence and render global and regional environments inhospitable to terrorist networks.
- **Counter-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction**: Actions taken to defeat the threat and/or use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States, our forces, allies, and partners.
- **Foreign Internal Defense**: Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security.
- **Security Force Assistance**: The DOD activities that contribute to unified action by the U.S. Government to support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions.
- **Counterinsurgency**: Comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances.
- **Unconventional Warfare**: Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.
- **Direct Action**: Short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or diplomatically sensitive environments, which employ specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets.
- **Special Reconnaissance**: Reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically-sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces.
- **Civil Affairs Operations**: Those military operations conducted by civil affairs forces that (1) enhance the relationship between military forces and civil authorities in localities where military forces are present; (2) require coordination with other interagency organizations, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, indigenous populations and institutions, and the private sector; and

(3) involve application of functional specialty skills that normally are the responsibility of civil government to enhance the conduct of civil-military operations.

- **Military Information Support Operations**: Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originators objectives.
- **Information Operations**: The integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.
- **Activities Specified by the President or Secretary of Defense**.[87]

Building and Sustaining a Special Operations Force

USSOCOM's dual roles as both a force provider and an operational command are rooted in the special operators' long struggle for understanding, legitimacy, and adequate support from their parent services.[88] It suffices to say that Congress solved the dilemma with the legislation creating USSOCOM and transferring most of the service's Title 10 responsibilities to the new command. Most notably, Congress left personnel management in the individual services. Often attributed solely to the struggle for resources, the actual way the SOF pie was divided is itself rooted in how the participants theoretically perceived special operations and SOF. The Title 10 authorities and responsibilities are also suggestive of how Americans think about SOF and theory. In the legislation and the debates surrounding it, the legislative consensus was for distinct SOF for special operations, but not entirely separated from the services.

- Develop special operations strategy, doctrine, and tactics.
- Prepare and submit budget proposals for SOF.
- Exercise authority, direction, and control over special operations expenditures.
- Train assigned forces.

- Conduct specialized courses of instruction.
- Validate requirements.
- Establish requirement priorities.
- Ensure interoperability of equipment and forces.
- Formulate and submit intelligence support requirements.
- Monitor special operations officers' promotions, assignments, retention, training, and professional military education.
- Ensure SOF's combat readiness.
- Monitor SOF's preparedness to carry out assigned missions.
- Develop and acquire special operations-peculiar equipment, materiel, supplies, and services.[89]

The perspectives highlighted in this chapter summarize the thinking of many and suggest much about an American school of thought and special operations theory. Special operations, as practiced by the United States, achieve effects through the application of SOF. SOF are specifically selected and trained people, who apply a distinctive set of attributes, values, principles, and organizational structure to the planning, preparation, and execution phases of missions, to achieve strategic, operational, and tactical objectives that are vulnerable to and better served by an alternative military capability. The reason for the existence of special operations is to couple *extraordinary* opportunity with *extraordinary* performance (exceptionality of personnel and organizations) to achieve *extraordinary* results. Such performance and results cannot be reasonably expected of conventional forces with their primary focuses and constraints without *undesirable* risks and costs. Both conventional forces and SOF must deal with the fog, friction, risks, and costs of war. Both seek to minimize and overcome friction, however conventional forces ultimately rely on mass and bureaucracy for success and therefore generate a larger footprint and more friction that must be overcome, creating greater risk of operational and strategic levels of violence and undesirable consequences. Through the use of special operations, SOF seek to avoid friction or use friction to achieve relative superiority by applying creativity and flexibility, leaving only a tactical footprint and keeping risk within acceptable bounds of loss and escalation. Yet, SOF can contribute to psychological and physical erosion in collaborative efforts with conventional forces to increase overall national strategic performance.[90] For the United States, conventional forces and SOF are complementary essential

capabilities needed to confront the complex security environment of the 21st century. Any SOF theory must acknowledge the roles and value of each and the relationship between them.

5. An American Theory Stated

> It is also easier to make a decision to employ force at the lower end of the conflict spectrum than it is to develop resolve for the use of any type of force at the upper end.– John O. Marsh, Secretary of the Army[91]

As stated previously, special operations and SOF are not exclusive to the U.S. military. Increasingly other governments have some form of military "special operations" and designated forces to conduct them, often in addition to "special operators" who are inherent to non-military agencies. Nonetheless, American values, strategic culture, and experience make the practice of military special operations by the United States distinctive, and these differences have given rise to a particular school of thought and set of constructs. A unified theory of American military special operations explains the nature, uniqueness, value, and application of this instrument of military power and the tensions that are inherent to it. Definitions to support this theory were developed in Chapter 3 and restated below. In Chapter 4, through an examination of pertinent intellectual works of selected researchers and presentation of examples of SOF thinking and doctrine, a foundation was laid for an understanding of special operations and SOF within an American strategic culture—a current school of thought. In this chapter, a set of theoretical premises about American special operations and SOF and a specific set of principles for conduct of special operations are advanced. Taken together, the definitions, the 26 premises, and the 14 principles represent a unified theory that explain American special operations and SOF, and provide an intellectual framework for considering SOF's evolution in the future.

Definitions Restated

The following definitions apply to this unified theory:

> ***SOF Power***. The capacity to implement a range of specialized military and paramilitary policy options to address a spectrum of challenges not usually, or for specific reasons, considered appropriate

for conventional military forces or other instruments of national power. SOF power supports national security and foreign policy objectives through military operations that influence the political, military, economic, and socio-psychological realms of state, regional, and global environments. SOF power is applicable across the spectrum of conflict and is exercised by designated SOF specifically chosen and prepared to conduct special operations. SOF power may be applied singularly, uniquely, or particularly, and may be more effective when used in conjunction with other instruments of national power. Other instruments, such as diplomacy, intelligence activities, economic assistance, or conventional military, may be supported by, act in concert with, or directly support SOF power.[92]

Special Operations. Military operations conducted by SOF. Special operations are overt, covert, and clandestine operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk nature, undertaken to achieve or support significant political or military objectives in support of national security and foreign policy. Such operations range across the spectrum of conflict from peace to war and make use of unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment, and training. They are often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically-sensitive environments where the use of conventional forces is either inappropriate or infeasible. They are characterized by one or more of the following: subtlety and imagination in planning and execution, time and political sensitivity, low visibility, support of indigenous forces, discriminate use of violence, need for regional expertise, oversight at the highest levels, and a high degree of risk. Special operations may support or be supported by conventional operations, or they may be prosecuted independently. Military and nonmilitary resources, including intelligence assets, may be used in concert or as enablers. Special operations doctrinal missions evolve with the changing context of the strategic environment, the needs of national security, and roles and missions of conventional forces.

Special Operations Forces. A strategic asset of Active and Reserve component forces of the military services designated by the secretary of defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations. They are characterized by selectivity in personnel, atypically configured

and equipped organizations and formations, specialized competencies and skill sets, and extraordinary training and education.

SOF Organizations. USSOCOM and the commands and units designated by the secretary of defense as members of SOF. SOF organizations may consist of special operators; distinctive DOD capabilities, such as civil affairs and military information support operations; and various administrative, staff, and support personnel. They are often organized in nonstandard structures and make use of unique and specialized technology, equipment, and doctrine. They may be augmented by enablers who provide additional administrative and logistical support. SOF organizations are further characterized by multiple command, operational, and support relationships with USSOCOM, other combatant commands, and the services.

Special Operator. The elite warrior at the epicenter of special operations—the point of the spear—who is specifically selected, educated, trained, and employed for the perilous missions of special operations. Special operators vary by service and mission focus, but share a common warrior ethos and espouse a set of values that permeates and defines SOF culture.

Enablers. Other personnel, units, and activities that are not designated members of SOF or USSOCOM force structure, but who use their skills, competencies, and capabilities to enable and support SOF personnel and operations. Enablers may be military, government agency, or contracted and non-contracted civilian personnel and activities.

A Set of American Premises[93]

Over a decade of the study and observation of American special operations and SOF thinking and practice, illustrated only in small part by the earlier chapters of this monograph, suggest to this author a set of 26 premises—that is, propositions—that apply to American special operations and SOF. The challenge advanced is that collectively the offered premises explain the whole of American special operations and SOF from a theoretical perspective, that the 26 premises are inclusive, and that each premise is required. Each premise represents a distinct aspect of American special operations and SOF; however the premises are interrelated and interact. Taken or extrapolated

from the existing body of knowledge, they are presented in a particular hierarchical order that generally moves from the broader perspective to the more specific, and encourages the reader to consider the earlier premises before the later. However, this is not meant to imply that earlier premises are more important than the later ones—the policymakers and members of the military profession must assess the relative importance of the premises for the circumstances and decisions confronting them. The purpose of the premises, and the theory more generally, is to help understand what might need to be considered in regard to American special operations and SOF.

Special operations represent a distinct military capability of strategic value to national security. In American strategic culture, military special operations and SOF—SOF power—represent a discrete type of military power in the same manner that land, naval, and air power differ and have need of theory and doctrine to guide their strategy, operations, and professional development. SOF are a distinct military instrument as are the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Joint Forces. All are founded in and focused on the phenomena of war and part of the military profession, but are dedicated to capabilities rooted in differing qualities, attributes, characteristics, and doctrine that enable them to better overcome friction and achieve success within their spheres.

SOF are a distinct military instrument as are the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Joint Forces.

SOF's autonomy within the American military institution is confirmed by experience, the impending challenges of a complex security environment, and increasing demands from policymakers. Congress and the president enshrined this distinctness in law (October 1986) in the face of some strong opposition from the services and others.[94] Like in many such controversies, the opposition's resistance was founded in both legitimate and parochial concerns about the needs, justifications, and implications for war fighting, force structure, and resources. Compelled by the law, civil and military leadership found and are still finding solutions to those concerns. After more than 25 years, SOF are an integral part of American military power and extend the military options for policymakers beyond the capabilities or prudent use of conventional forces, but tensions remain in regard to missions, personnel management, and resources.

Special operations have strategic utility. Robust SOF capabilities represent real-world policy tools and options. That is to say, SOF may have a direct effect on the strategic outcome by their application of military power. In these circumstances, SOF's superior tactical proficiency provides a leverage point for achieving strategic outcomes—strategic performance. Leveraging special operations capabilities—mental, moral, proficiency, technology, and equipment—can also create operational and tactical success; however, the greatest utility for the investment and risk to SOF capacity is when the application of SOF directly leverage the strategic outcome desired. SOF both shape future outcomes and provide real-time resolutions through their mission sets.

SOF are an instrument of military power. Special operations are focused on the potential for, preparation for, and conduct of war, operating across the entire spectrum of conflict and military operations. While special operations activities are varied and defined by the specific context of the environment and mission, the potential for violence always exists and the use of force—direct and indirect—or the leveraging of force are the central focus of special operations. Consequently, SOF operations are subordinate to the theory of war, military theory, theory of conflict, and generally to principles that apply to war and conflict. However, SOF often make use of these principles in differing ways from conventional military forces and adhere to distinct principles for special operations.

As an instrument of military power, SOF's purpose is to act in circumstances that imply conflict, potential conflict, or the possibility of violence. SOF may serve policy or complete missions in humanitarian and other peaceful circumstances, but SOF's raison d'etre is war. If this were not true, other nonmilitary instruments of interaction would be more logical.

SOF members are part of the larger American military profession and subject to the obligations of the profession to the nation. While an obvious conclusion, its implications are often less clear. Special operations are subject to legal and moral restraints and moralistic and legalistic constraints. Like the rest of the U.S. military, American military special operations activities are subordinate to policy and subject to civilian control. They are also an integral part of the American military hierarchy and while they may perform missions under the direct supervision of policymakers, they are still bound by and subject to the values, rules, and customs of the larger military.

Special operations, like the conventional military, are also subject to and affected by normative constraints of the society and culture that authorizes and sustains them. These constraints apply to the decision to conduct the operation, the nature of the operation, and the success of the operation. For the United States these are of two kinds. Traditional American values and normative commitments create constraints that are matters of legal and moral obligation—legal and moral constraints. Special operations should be able to be rationally justified in both legal and moral terms by recourse to such things as international law and practice and just war theory. A second type of constraint is also intrinsic to American special operations—political-cultural constraints. Although not founded in international practice and law or theory, this type asserts legitimacy and plays to opinion. Couched in moralistic and legalistic terms, such constraints, whether justified or not, become diffused in popular conventional wisdom and affect decisions in regard to the undertaking and conduct of operations. Equally important, if unaddressed such constraints can undermine the strategic effects of a successful tactical operation by calling into question its legal or moral justification. Even if such criticism cannot be completely overcome, a solid normative case for action enables the operation to be undertaken and contributes to its success in achieving strategic effects. Special operations inevitably raise legal and moral questions and must be justifiable in legal and moral terms.[95]

Special operations should be able to be rationally justified in both legal and moral terms by recourse to such things as international law and practice and just war theory.

Legal and moral and political-cultural constraints can be understood and given appropriate political and mission consideration as would any other strategic factor.[96] However, SOF cannot operate so far out of convention that it is not accepted as a legitimate actor of the sovereign state.

Special operations and SOF exist on the cutting edge of change and continuity in the security environment. SOF, by virtue of the value of SOF power to national security in the emerging security environment, are logically policymakers' preferred first responders to a wide range of traditional and nontraditional threats and opportunities. The emerging environment is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) associated with great change. U.S. relative power is constrained by the necessity for legitimacy and the competing demands on national resources. SOF's

qualities, attributes, and performance are well-suited to such periods of ambiguity, instability, and diffused power: SOF can both deal with and exploit these with special operations. However, such periods place a premium on strategic thinking and performance. In such circumstances, advice provided, choices made, and actions taken may have extraordinary effects on security and in shaping the future. Special operations must achieve the desired strategic effects and avoid any undesirable second- or third-order effects. Special operations logically push the envelope in regard to changes and continuities within the context of their operations, but always with a consideration of all the potential consequences and the greater security concerns. SOF respond to and make use of VUCA in ways that differ from conventional forces and other agencies. To the degree SOF understand the interplay in the various realms of power—political, economic, military, and socio-psychological—the greater the potential for positive influence through selected action and non-action.

Military special operations can be conducted unilaterally, in support of, or supported by conventional, interagency, whole of government, and coalition operations, or in concert with all of the above. SOF's capabilities and attributes are applicable across the spectrum of military operations. SOF education, training, adaptability, and flexibility enable the force to work in varied circumstances and among diverse populations and cultures. The attributes of Warrior diplomats apply to organizational as well as to indigenous cultures. Through SOF's competencies, limited organic material capabilities are leveraged to realize shared and SOF-specific objectives at various levels of interaction with multiple and diverse actors.

SOF and conventional capabilities are complementary, integrative, and mutually supportive. SOF and conventional forces are selected, recruited, trained/educated, and equipped in support of their unique purposes. However, SOF and conventional force capabilities are complementary, integrative, and mutually supportive as instruments of national security in support of common goals and objectives. SOF function in ways and places conventional forces cannot or should not, complementing conventional capabilities in the assurance of national security. SOF are a part of national military capacity and are integrated into the national defense military strategies and operational and tactical planning. In military art, SOF and conventional forces are best seen as mutually supportive at all levels of preparation for war and conduct of war.

Natural tensions exist between special operations and SOF and the greater American political system and conventional military. Americans for the most part are opposed to unconventional conflicts and any form of elitism. Such conflicts do not adhere to Americans' preferences for conduct of a decisive war and raise political questions and moral issues for which the right answers are unclear and potentially controversial. As a result of who they are and what they are asked to do, SOF are different. The differences engender a degree of exclusiveness and commitment essential to sustaining a ready force, and that is even admired as part of an American subculture. However, exclusiveness and elitism run counter to America's greater culture of anti-elitism and egalitarianism.[97] Consequently, SOF must manage a balance of political, public, and conventional military trust and SOF cultural imperatives that sustain an acceptable and sharp military instrument of quiet professionals.

Special operations and SOF evolve over time according to strategic context. Special operations and SOF are defined by the nature of the threats or opportunities in the security environment, the needs of policymakers, and the ability or inability of conventional forces to provide appropriate policy options. SOF provide the opportunity for limited specialization and capabilities within the military—offering a potential human, organizational, and technological capability not possible, prudent, or cost effective to attempt or sustain as part of conventional forces. SOF "specialness" in competencies, capabilities, and missions are "special" only as long as these are not more effectively and efficiently subsumed in conventional forces.

However, the migration to or appearance of any particular SOF capability or attribute in conventional forces does not necessarily violate a primary or residual validity within SOF. Such validity is founded in SOF's policy or military utility, mission set, and cultural imperatives. Some attributes can and some cannot be moved between SOF and conventional forces. Sometimes, knowledge and equipment can be transferred, but the actual competency cannot.

With strategic anticipation, special operations requirements can be identified and SOF developed that complement conventional forces without competing with them, and in a manner that optimizes efficacy of the whole of the American military.

Special operations and SOF are applicable at all the levels of war and interaction—strategic, operational, and tactical. Special operations and

SOF are relevant to all levels of war and across the spectrum of military activities. SOF can independently or collaboratively perform shaping, preventive, preemptive, and punitive operations in support of tactical, operational, or strategic objectives. Special operations create opportunities, alleviate sources of friction, restrict adversaries' options, and otherwise directly or indirectly create favorable effects for achieving U.S. interests. SOF can act singularly or as a member of bilateral or multilateral joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational efforts. SOF can act independently of conventional forces or in supporting and supported roles to augment conventional forces at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. The converse is also true. Conventional forces can act independently of SOF, or in supported or supporting roles at the three levels of war.

Special operations missions are defined by the strategic, operational, and tactical contexts. Special people, doctrine, organizations, technology, and equipment characterize special operations missions. Otherwise, special operations would be accommodated as part of the conventional force's portfolio. Essentially, military special operations prepare to do what conventional forces cannot and should not do or what has not been done before. Therefore, while there are type missions in doctrine and training, there are no "typical" special operations missions.[98]

SOF develop type doctrinal missions and training mission sets, referred to as activities, based on an assessment of the strategic security environment and anticipated requirements. These serve doctrinal and training needs. However, SOF conduct repetitive rehearsal missions to practice for actual missions based on the strategic, operational, and tactical context relative to the mission's objectives. Doctrine and training are designed to hone the professional edge, but actual missions are unique and require specialized planning and the bringing together of doctrinal and practiced skill sets into new arrangements. The better SOF leaders, planners, and operators get context right, the greater the probability of success in pursuing a particular mission.

Thus, SOF mission efficacy relies in large part on developing and sustaining an appropriate nurturing and professionalizing environment. The SOF environment must develop the personnel with the appropriate mentalities to a high level of professional competency and proficiency for the anticipated requirements and the flexibility and adaptability to respond to unanticipated requirements at any level of engagement. Some type missions may endure longer than others, but logically missions migrate in and out of

the SOF portfolio over time based on changes in the security environment and conventional capabilities. Changes in SOF activities result in changes in structure, manning, technology, and equipment, but any actual real-world mission is context dependent.

Factors that affect assignment of any particular mission to SOF organizations include: the objective; the strategic, operational, and tactical context; capabilities, availability, and responsiveness of conventional forces and SOF; and political and military risk.

Special operations and SOF's relative value increase as direct strategic utility is approached. Special operations and SOF provide a range of creative policy initiatives and responses that can be exercised well below the threshold of open conflict or international condemnation. SOF therefore provide a means to exercise acceptable and effective power in complex security environments, creating a means of less risky policy action.

However, SOF as an instrument of power rely principally on the quality and celerity of singular tactical performance to achieve strategic effectiveness. The more directly the tactical objectives and action coincide with the desired policy or strategic objectives and effects, the more direct the strategic performance and the greater the value of special operations and SOF. Conversely, the more direct the linkage between tactical operations and strategic performance, the greater the need for tactical autonomy and initiative, and paradoxically greater strategic control. The former enables the mission to be shaped by the actual context on the ground. In the case of the latter, because of the stakes involved, decision makers want greater visibility and control, and tactical forces require access to decision makers to reconcile the strategic implications of unforeseen friction and ambiguity on the ground. However, the more external control that is exercised—and the more levels involved—the less independence SOF have and the greater the risk of forfeiting the SOF inherent strengths of flexibility and adaptability. Therefore, SOF tactical missions are often developed directly from an approved policy option, and policy guidance and control is streamlined between the strategic and tactical levels.

Of great value in periods of VUCA, the use of special operations as a direct instrument of policy normally poses less strategic risk than other military means as long as the mission is appropriate for SOF. Reduced strategic risk results from several factors. First, SOF are extraordinarily well prepared for such undertakings. Second, SOF employment does not necessarily signal

a national commitment, and can provide a degree of plausible deniability. Third, while SOF tactical success is more directly linked to strategic performance than conventional forces, SOF tactical failure seldom precludes strategic success by other policy means.

In addition, when unanticipated strategic crises occur, SOF can respond expeditiously and expediently to address a wide range of strategic threats and opportunities, resolving the issue or creating prospects for a considered response by conventional forces or other policy means.

A final perspective is that SOF are a limited military capacity; SOF can neither be mass-produced nor created after emergencies occur. While SOF capabilities have applicability at all levels of war, it is illogical and imprudent to expend the force on lesser objectives or objectives that are better suited to conventional force capabilities. Strategic value correlates to strategic performance and potential, and SOF's capabilities represent both.[99]

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Hence, strategic use provides relative value, but SOF may be critical to success at any level. Mutual trust and understanding are essential to the best use of SOF.

Special operations can be conducted overtly, covertly, clandestinely, or mixtures thereof; however any choice has potential political, legal, moral, and operational risks associated with it. Many SOF missions are overt. They are openly conducted and are acknowledged or readily attributable to the United States. However, SOF can plan and conduct covert operations to conceal the identity of the United States or permit plausible denial. SOF can also plan and execute clandestine operations in order to assure secrecy or concealment of the operation, even if the U.S. interest is known. Any special operation may have aspects that are overt, covert, or clandestine simultaneously or sequentially. The choices in regard to these have relevance at the political, strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Consequently, the deliberation of political, legal, moral, and operational considerations and risks are inherent to any policy or planning process.

SOF organizational culture champions creativity, adaptability, flexibility, competency, and performance in SOF personnel and organizations.

Contrary to the certain—hence predictable—functional behavior sought and brought to bear by the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure of conventional forces, special operations overcome the friction of war and achieve objectives through individual and team cross-competencies and enabling innovative behaviors—new or different ways of approaching and overcoming problems.[100] These behaviors, guided by special operations principles and aided by team organizational structure and specialized technology and equipment, are stressed and reinforced in planning, rehearsal, and conduct of operations. The organizational culture within SOF values the opportunistic nature of such behaviors as well as reinforcing individual and team competency and performance. Such a culture engenders the support of other actors.

Special operations are enhanced by selectivity in personnel, expressed in the SOF Truth that quality is better than quantity. Selectivity applies specifically to SOF operators, although a degree of selection or self-selection applies to the force as a whole. Selectivity in personnel argues that valued SOF personnel attributes can be elevated across the force through recruitment based on psychological and experiential testing for suggestive personal attributes, traits, and performance; rigorous culling in training; and a nurturing culture, once a part of the force. Different services have different selectivity criteria for their SOF personnel, but generally they aim at acquiring those who exemplify the attributes of warrior, creativity, and flexibility associated with SOF's uniqueness.[101] These attributes are further enhanced by continuous training, education, technology, and experience.

Selectivity of personnel empowers the force with desirable qualities for special operations success, but it also creates quantitative limits on the number of SOF candidates and graduates, and requires extraordinary expenditures of time and resources to maintain the qualitative edge. The consequences are expressed in the SOF Truths that SOF cannot be mass produced nor created after emergencies occur. Selectivity contends SOF unique attributes are distinguishable and can be identified and nurtured by the proper environment. Consequently, SOF solicit, encourage, and promote different patterns of reasoning in recruitment and the planning and conduct of operations.

The proficiency of SOF personnel and the applicability of special operations are enhanced by the degree of cross-cultural competence of the forces involved. Cultural knowledge improves all military operations. While cultural-specific or regional knowledge has its own value, special operations

require SOF to acquire the more inclusive cultural-general knowledge to operate successfully in any cultural environment in order to maximize the potential of any particular situation. To the extent special operations personnel possess the ability to quickly learn to operate efficiently in any culture, the higher the probability of advocating and achieving favorable strategic results.[102]

Special operations are enhanced by horizontal and particular organizational structures and practices. Rank and hierarchical and standard organizational structures are useful and necessary for organizational control, but special operations require a degree of flexibility and adaptability in such structure. In SOF, experience and understanding are recognized and accepted as critical mission factors. At any point in special operations, any individual or group of special operators may hold critical information and decisions in regard to mission success in their hands. SOF operating procedures and culture recognize and accept the most knowledgeable or most relevant personnel often need to be heard directly. Consequently, the chain of command operates in a more horizontal and streamlined manner in regard to knowledge and operations.

SOF have specific rank and organizational structures based on their special operations experience and service cultures. However, adaptability and flexibility are inherent within existing structures, and SOF practice and culture accept and facilitate organizational tailoring for missions.

Special operations are gender and rank independent, but are influenced by and subject to mission context and the conventions of the time.

Special operations are enhanced by selectivity in technology and equipment. Special operations require or are often enhanced by use of non-U.S. military standard technology and equipment. Such technology and equipment may be inherent to a SOF organization, tasked as support from other government agencies, or acquired through purchasing, contracting, or other means. In acquisition decisions, mission demands remain paramount, but the advantages and disadvantages of the methods of procurement, which are many and conflictive, must always be considered.

Special operations make use of and are dependent on enablers. The SOF Truth that most SOF operations require non-SOF assistance is an open acknowledgment that SOF is dependent in most circumstances on the assistance and support of the U.S. military services, government agencies, and others. Such assistance and support may be direct or indirect, but enable SOF

in preparedness and planning, rehearsing, and conducting special operations missions. Assistance and support ranges across a broad spectrum from transportation, to facilities, to cover and supporting attacks, to knowledge and expert personnel—and from the strategic to the tactical levels. Enablers enhance the strategic reach, competency, and effects of special operations personnel and organizations, but also pose potential challenges and risks related to operational effectiveness and security. Enablers may be in direct support of the SOF mission or may be pursuing their normal functions that indirectly enable a SOF mission.

Special operations benefit from diversity within SOF and among enablers. Diversity is a positive virtue in SOF. It potentially brings more nuanced competencies and insights to bear on special operations mission planning, rehearsal, and conduct. It also provides a similar enrichment to activities related to preparation for war. For similar reasons, SOF value and special operations benefit from diversity among and within enablers. Different enablers bring different perspectives and capabilities to an operation, generating ideas and options for consideration. However, diversity can also be a source of multiple frictions, and value added versus tensions is always a matter of consideration for SOF leaders.

Special operations inform and improve conventional forces. Successes and failures on multiple planes within special operations and SOF inform the conventional forces doctrine, manning, equipment, and operations. SOF are inherently early adaptors. Not only are most special operators specifically selected for this attribute and SOF culture encourage it, but the nature of modern special operations encourage adoption of innovative structures, technology, and doctrines. As the face of war and military operations change in response to different challenges, conventional forces logically learn from SOF. It would be irresponsible to do otherwise. Such adoption or adaption of SOF structures, technology, equipment, and practices does not make conventional forces more SOF-like: it is more correctly seen as a part of conventional forces modernization. The nature of conventional forces and SOF are not affected. Each continues to conduct war in accordance with their nature. The attributes of the forces' personnel and processes to success are largely unchanged. SOF also learn from conventional forces thinking and experience. SOF largely recruit from conventional forces and remain integrated with the services through legislative design that affects professional development and personnel administration.[103]

Special operations depend on vertical, horizontal, and competency hierarchies, and their simultaneous interaction, to achieve mission success. The active and open interaction among the three hierarchies is an inherent force multiplier within SOF. Interaction among hierarchies exists to some degree in all successful organizations; however, in conventional forces interaction is clearly functionally and process defined and rigidly controlled, or occurs as a result of exceptional circumstances. In SOF, the mission-oriented culture encourages a freer and less vertical and linear interaction among hierarchies. SOF culture encourages streamlining of processes and more horizontal interacting in order to facilitate control and knowledge sharing.

Special operations success centers on the human aspects of warfare. SOF personnel attributes are the key distinguishing feature of special operations. Four of the five SOF Truths emphasize the centrality of the SOF operator to success in special operations. Mission success is dependent on the warrior ethos and the creativity and flexibility of the warrior. In SOF culture, technology and equipment exist only to support the operator at the point of the spear. Founded in experience, this premise is the basis for SOF's recruitment, training, education, and operational methods. However, the premise implies more than physical fighting or the imposition of will: SOF seek to understand, operate in, and exploit the human domain in order to lessen or increase friction and to create opportunities. Human interaction and relationships of all kinds matter in special operations. SOF focus on the human interaction involved to achieve success. In part this explains a SOF preference for Sun Tzu, whose approach to warfare focuses on human interactions.[104] SOF seek relationships to enhance their own capabilities, but also to leverage the capabilities of others or favorably influence them—individuals, militaries, indigenous populations, indigenous political elites, allies, neutral parties, and adversaries. SOF personnel understand fighting and the power of weapons and technology, but they fundamentally believe that success in specific operations, and the shaping of the environment and avoidance or winning of wars, are rooted in the human aspects of conflict and seek advantages in them.

Extraordinary relationships exist between SOF and intelligence activities, other interagency organizations, and multinational partners. A special relationship exists between SOF and activities of intelligence and other interagency organizations based on reciprocated wellbeing and concerns. SOF missions are reliant on extensive and accurate intelligence from the

tactical to the strategic levels. Knowledge is a key advantage that SOF exploit in planning, rehearsal, and conduct of missions. On the other hand, SOF-specific mission tasking, or as an additional product of presence, is a uniquely reliable source of human intelligence for intelligence agencies. Each serves the other's needs in very direct ways, and the exercise of an extraordinary relationship is justified by the mutual reliance and need to share perspectives and deconflict missions and differences.

In a similar manner, SOF's relationships with all interagency organizations are extraordinary as compared to other military organizations. Conventional force organizations cooperate and coordinate their activities with other interagency activities as required, but SOF tend to approach such organizations with a "by, with, and through" mentality that assimilates these organizations' objectives and activities into SOF missions or integrates SOF objectives into these organizations' activities. This mentality—one of trust building and risk mitigation—also characterizes SOF interaction with allies and indigenous partners. Such leveraging surpasses the direct military function of fighting and promotes greater stability or a quicker and easier return to normalcy. As a matter of practice, these relationships are more direct and streamlined.

In special operations, an organization's effectiveness is inversely proportional to the complexity of the organization's size, structure, and mechanisms of control. The larger the size of the organization or the more complex its structure and chain of command, the more resistance or friction is induced and the greater the probability that a special operation will fail, falter, or require greater than desired levels of effort. Missions that require mass forces, great degrees of functionality, and echelons of detailed control are more likely missions suited for conventional forces. Overburdening SOF organizations with structural overhead, redundant capabilities, and over control stifles the very attributes that make SOF appropriate for special operations. Conversely, special operations must be appropriately and precisely resourced and supported with constant access to the decision maker at the highest level of concern.[105] There are tipping points in mission requirements and risk where the superior functional bureaucracy and mass of the conventional forces are better suited to an objective. However, in cases when SOF are better suited, mission planning and conduct should play to SOF's characteristics and attributes.

Organizations dedicated to special operations are inherently precarious.[106] Special operations organizations fare best in times of crises or in situations when unique skills are in urgent demand or in situations where politicians do not wish to acknowledge ambiguous threats as a crisis. "Nor is it odd that when the crisis abates, unorthodox skills should experience a diminution of legitimacy in the minds of the public and the military establishment."[107] SOF organization, force structure, and culture is a product of both what it is asked to do and what it is not required to do. Hence, SOF's culture and force structure are shaped by their missions and the requirements for successfully accomplishing them, and differ from those of the conventional forces. Conventional forces are shaped by their own requirements. Such differences, while well justified by requirements of war levied on both, are not well understood by either. Consequently, as SOF pursue perceived needs to conduct special operations, they invariably encounter conflicts with the larger structure related to value, legitimacy of identity, and mistrust.[108] Both peace and competition for resources compound SOF's precarious status.

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Even though each is a part of the same greater military and share most of the same values, the differences in perspective and focus can be stark. For example, SOF reliance on creativity and flexibility is counterintuitive to a conventional forces' necessary preference for predictability through mass, functionality, and discipline. SOF incorporate the creativity and flexibility of its personnel as an integral part of a plan, but conventional forces rely on these only in plan development, or when the plan has failed. SOF value the human contribution and believe it leads to success; conventional forces value the predictability of performance (functionality) and reward those who meet standards. SOF often portray themselves as elite and unconventional. Conventional forces generally resent the trappings of elitism or perceive it as devaluing their contributions. Genuine questions of authority, relationships, mission and roles, force structure, and resources exist between USSOCOM and the services. The recurring debates have engendered a degree of mistrust among all the services, and SOF have long been entwined and often at odds in issues within their own services. SOF can anticipate continued

challenges to their value, roles, and missions, even though its existence is encoded in law.[109]

SOF are also a precarious organization as a result of internal contradictions to their own cultural identity. As USSOCOM further develops in its dual roles as a functional combatant command and potential operational command if directed, it becomes more like the conventional forces' headquarters in functions and practices. At the same time, the growth associated with USSOCOM's institutionalization and expansion is lowering the ratio of special operators to others assigned to SOF, and to a worrying degree those in critical staff positions. The rapid redeployment of special operators has exacerbated this. All of this is for good reasons, but it does raise issues of operator-centric values, identity, and trust. Precariousness is an enduring aspect of America's design of SOF and requires continuing attention.[110]

Principles of Special Operations[111]

Special operations appear to succeed through adherence to a general set of principles particularly applicable to special operations. The better an understanding of these principles is integrated into the decision processes at all levels and the planning, rehearsal, and conduct of special operations, and the better they are adhered to, the greater the potential for mission and tactical, operational, and strategic success. Taken together, they overcome and make use of friction in ways that characterize special operations and SOF.

Both conventional forces and SOF make use of principles for the planning and conduct of war. Some are shared and others are more exclusive in value to one or the other. Both extrapolate the principles of war into lesser doctrinal principles and concepts. Even when a principle is shared, the emphasis and interpretation in special operations may differ. Understanding these differences further illuminates the distinctness of and need for special operations. For example, the principles of war can be argued to apply to all war. In that regard, an understanding of the principle of mass is useful to all. In the current version, it is stated in a positive sense "… to concentrate the effects of combat power at the most advantageous place and time to produce decisive results."[112] It is time tested with conventional forces and a crucial concept for their operations. Its central focus is on force or power ratios. Unstated in this version, but obvious is a general need to avoid letting the enemy achieve mass. However, special operations seldom, if ever, achieve this

kind of conventional mass in their operations. SOF are neither organized nor manned and equipped to achieve conventional mass on their own. Clearly, a principle of mass is less useful at the operational and strategic levels of thinking about and planning special operations. Even at the tactical level, conventional ideas of mass can only be temporarily achieved and cannot be sustained. While the principle of mass applies to surrogate warfare as indigenous forces achieve strength and move toward conventionally, the special operators do not directly apply mass, and mass is a desired consequence of the mission. In his study of special operations, McRaven recognized that mass was a less useful focus for SOF and argued that relative superiority was the crucial concept for special operations to focus on. Even though relative superiority can intellectually be argued as a form of mass achieved through speed and surprise, the idea of relative superiority is more illustrative and useful for special operations.[113]

McRaven and others as part of an American school have offered specific principles, concepts, and characteristics that taken together suggest a general set of useful principles for special operations.[114] Founded largely in experience, much of which has been tactical, the principles as extrapolated and restated below apply to all special operations—strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Like the principles of war, they must be considered in an integrated and holistic manner to determine their relative importance in any particular circumstance and in order to create the synergistic effects necessary for success at any particular level. None appears to violate the principles of war and any challenge of their validity more logically lies in their usefulness to the community.

Relative Superiority. Relative superiority is the ability to act in regard to stronger adversaries or in unfavorable circumstances in a manner and at a time to gain a decisive advantage. In tactical situations, this may be as straight forward as the condition achieved when an attacking force gains a decisive advantage over a larger defending force. However, relative superiority can be achieved at any level of war or any place on the spectrum of conflict when decisive advantage is attained in the face of severely adverse circumstances or more powerful actors. For example, SOF's ability to act in favorable ways in regard to national interests when other instruments of national power cannot or should not be used, or when an adversary believes the United States lacks the ability or will to act appropriately, can provide relative decisive advantage. At the tactical, operational, and strategic levels,

SOF seek to provide, attain, and sustain relative superiority—a decisive advantage over others or circumstances at the pivotal moment of interaction, engagement, and decision.

Direct Action. Direct action is the ability to bring tactical capabilities to bear immediately at a place and time in a manner to produce desired outcomes. SOF are contingent forces designed for immediate direct action. Any deterrent value is subsidiary. While the term is used currently to describe the specific activity of small scale offensive action, it is a larger principle with a much broader application. Special operations culture focuses on what direct tactical actions can be taken to achieve the response or conditions desired. Such tactical actions may provide immediate solutions or shape future outcomes—or direct and indirect results. They may also serve multiple lines of operations or policy ends. However, the principle is to focus on what immediate actions can be accomplished and act directly in regard to them. In all cases of proper use of special operations the line of control between what the senior decision maker desires and mission planning is simplified—more direct or streamlined. For example, SOF are given a policy option to execute moves directly to tactical mission planning, rehearsal, and conduct with little resort to intervening planning.

Purpose. Purpose is the ability to absorb and to inculcate the purpose of the senior decision maker into the planning and mentality of the mission team and individual members so that the intent of the authorizing authority is served regardless of changing circumstances. It is facilitated by maximum delegation of authority, streamlined chain of command, and coordinated teamwork. It enables simplicity in planning, preparation, and execution.

Understanding. Special operations are rooted in understanding. Understanding is the ability to integrate mission and strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence with the individual and collective knowledge and experience of SOF personnel to advise, plan, prepare, and act. It also incorporates a cross-cultural perspective into the decision making and mission development, planning, and execution. Understanding enables creativity and flexibility and allows SOF to deal with and make use of VUCA.

Initiative. Initiative is the ability to act under any circumstances in a manner to exert more positive control over the tactical, operational, or strategic environment. SOF provide strategic initiative in providing options in circumstances where other instruments of power are unavailable, ineffective,

inappropriate, countered, or too provocative or risky. Initiative seeks to place the adversary in a position where he is reacting to SOF or friendly actions as opposed to SOF or allies reacting to his. It also seeks to get ahead of probable negative events by proactive action. Initiative is achieved by the willingness and capacity to act and the selection of appropriate objectives and concepts. Initiative takes control of timing and contributes to the element of surprise at all levels of war. SOF seek opportunities for the initiative in advising decision makers on policy and strategy and in the planning, rehearsal, and conduct of operations.

Surprise. Surprise is the ability to act in such a manner as to catch the adversary off guard regardless of his state of preparedness. It is inherent to all warfare and can be achieved through timing, security, methods and resources used, deception, counterintuitive thinking, or by taking advantages of an adversary's social, political, economic, military, and intelligence service weaknesses to include vulnerabilities in supposed strengths.

Simplicity. Simplicity is the ability to identify and limit the number of tactical objectives of an operation to only the ones essential to mission success: only ones which directly contribute to the decision maker's purpose, and thus avoiding the friction, diversion of effort, and added complexity of subsidiary but nonessential efforts. It is achieved by understanding the political and military situation, the intent of higher level objectives, and what tactical objectives are essential to achieving the decision maker's purpose. Simplicity requires good intelligence before and during an operation to understand and manage all the factors and variables relative to the mission's planning, rehearsal, and execution. Technological and equipment innovation contributes to simplicity by overcoming obstacles and enhancing mobility, security, and surprise. SOF's inherent creativity and flexibility enable simplicity in mission planning and execution.

Security. Security is the ability to plan, prepare, and operate in such a manner that any action is unanticipated, invisible, deniable, or purpose unforeseen or irresistible. Security contributes to surprise. It involves protecting secrets, managing cover and deception, and physical security. Security provides control over timing and surprise.

Risk Management. Management of risk is the ability to minimize risk through the processes of planning, preparation, and execution for friendly forces while maximizing it for others. Special operations embrace risk as inherent to conflict and war and make use of an understanding of it.

Risk management is not risk aversion; it is a calculation of probabilities and how an adversary will react in regard to risk. SOF's attributes, particularly adaptability and flexibility, extend the boundaries of acceptable friendly risk.

Warrior Ethos. Warrior ethos is the ability to capitalize on the human dimension in warfare. It focuses on the attributes of the human equation—courage, intellect, boldness, and perseverance—in conflict and war and recognizes people are the catalyst for success at any level of warfare. Internally SOF advocate human effectiveness can be continuously enhanced at the individual and group levels. It is manifested in adherence to selectivity and the continuous education and training that contribute to creativity and flexibility. SOF also focus on mission rehearsal, horizontal structures, and learning organization attributes. However, the warrior ethos also elevates the importance of considering the human strengths and vulnerabilities of adversaries and the role of other human actors and populations in consideration of and the planning, rehearsal, and conduct of missions. It also involves the consideration of the human costs of war and operations other than war. SOF acknowledge the role of doctrine and technology in war, use organizations and equipment, but the warrior ethos embraces the premise that conflict and war are fundamentally human enterprises and won or lost based on advantages of intellect, moral courage, and will.

Mobility. Mobility is the ability to be rapidly deployed or redeployed to worldwide operational environments, or within operational or tactical areas. It is measured by responsiveness and reach. Mobility includes the consideration of the means of movement and insertion or extraction in hostile or surreptitious circumstances. Proper application of mobility contributes to speed and surprise at all levels of war and can be the lynchpin in relative superiority. The principle also implies considerations of the associated consequences and risks of a mobility decision and the means used to execute it.

Integrated operations. Integrated operations imply the ability to address threats to and take advantage of opportunities for national security through the proper integration of SOF objectives and capabilities with the various other instruments of national power. It also includes the development and execution of operations with other military forces and nonmilitary agencies, or SOF-unique operations in a shared environment. Integrated operations imply understanding and consideration of other actor's objectives, practices, and cultures and the national, local, and organizational perspectives.

Asymmetrical Operations. The principle of asymmetrical operations is the ability to achieve security objectives through the use of unconventional or unanticipated thinking, capabilities, and methods. It implies a thorough understanding and consideration of an adversary's or other actor's capabilities, intent, and expectations of action and devising an operation that counters or exploits them to advantage.

Preparedness. As a principle, preparedness is the ability to anticipate and consider the potential threats and opportunities of the strategic, operational, and tactical environments and prepare for them. At the strategic level, preparedness requires an entrepreneur spirit and a willingness to anticipate emerging threats and opportunities, new and special relationships, doctrine, force structure, weapons, and equipment as well as education and training. At the operational and tactical levels, it implies training, individual and team proficiency, planning, mission preparation, and rehearsals. In the conduct of operations, it implies never letting your guard down and anticipation of and preparation for potential issues. Preparedness contributes to simplicity in planning design, shortens response times, and enables speed and flexibility at the tactical level. Preparedness reduces friction at all levels.

American military special operations have much in common with many other militaries' approaches to special operations, but also differ in significant ways that make the American approach distinctive. In examining the literature, doctrine, and experience of American special operations and SOF a coherent and useful theory begins to emerge. The premises and principles offered above frame this American theory; however, each and its implications, as well as the relationships and interactions among them, need to be explored and explained in greater detail.

6. Implications of an American School of Thought

In thinking reflectively about the research and the endeavor to synthesize an American perspective of special operations, several concerns emerged about what such a theory and school of thought might suggest for SOF's leadership. A number of military staffs and others have addressed in detail manifold SOF future issues from differing perspectives. No attempt is made here to summarize or document these issues. Instead, this chapter highlights specific and fundamental concerns suggested by consideration of the proposed unified theory in light of the probable national security future. Perhaps not surprisingly, these concerns are interrelated and intertwined. However, if leadership manages these fundamental concerns over time well, the men and women of SOF will undoubtedly meet any challenges adversaries or circumstances may present.

Roles and Activities

SOF roles and activities are logically defined by the nature of the threats or opportunities in the security environment, the needs of policymakers, and the ability or inability of conventional forces to provide appropriate policy options. However, they are also logically defined by the qualities and limitations of special operations and SOF. In the nonconventional instability of the 21st century, the temptation for policymakers, and even senior military decision makers, will be to increasingly turn to SOF. The more successful special operations are, the greater the demand. However, the strategic trap in SOF being the "go to" solution for everything is that eventually a sort of strategic paralysis sets. Policymakers ignore other potential options and wait on a "special operations" solution for every problem. Furthermore, SOF become stretched too thin to respond in a timely manner to authentic crises best served by a SOF response. Eventually, SOF lose their distinctive and qualitative edge, and consequently their advantage in regard to friction. In the process, a naturally-constrained resource is squandered as opposed to optimized. A fine weapon is better used, but for the purposes for which it is designed.

What this all suggests is that while SOF leadership must continue to be responsive to policymakers and senior military decision makers, the leadership must continuously reexamine how special operations and SOF fit into the spectrum of conflict and the optimal roles and activities for SOF. Any specific answer to this dilemma is a recurring staff issue to be revisited periodically or as conditions change; however, the questions and the framework for the answers are found in theory. For example, if as asserted in the above paragraph that instability in the 21st century is largely unconventional and it is extensive, exactly how best do special operations and SOF fit in? Key words are found in the definition of special operations—"overt, covert, and clandestine operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk nature … make use of unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training. They are often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments where the use of general purpose forces [conventional forces] is either inappropriate or infeasible." Definitions of SOF and SOF power and the premises and principles are also a critical source of insights into how SOF might need to argue the roles and activities pie should be optimally sliced in a security environment where the unconventional challenge is the overwhelming prospect.

Force Structure

Two facets of force structure are worth leadership's greatest consideration. First is the question of how much SOF? In regards to the apparent increased requirements in the 2012 Defense Strategy, DOD appears ready to increase SOF's structure.[115] USSOCOM has already surfaced a concern that force structure growth of special operators is problematic and the issues are expressed in the SOF Truths. Hence, a theoretical basis for concern is apparent, but theory articulates an intellectual basis for the essentiality of the attributes and the probable consequences of waiving or diluting them. SOF's recruitment from experienced service members is limited by the size and construct of that pool of candidates. Reductions in conventional forces shrink the SOF recruitment pool. Those candidates have already been successfully screened by conventional mechanisms, representing a degree of military professionalism and experience, before entering a SOF scrub. Changes in recruitment practices and in selectivity measures within SOF pose mission and consequently strategic risks. Special operations successes

rely on qualitative differences and any degradation of quality in any manner affects the ability to overcome friction.

A second question is what kind of SOF structure? Existing on the edge of change and continuity in the security environment, SOF will need to change with the times. There is a natural temptation to assign to SOF and USSOCOM, or for SOF or USSOCOM to seek to acquire, missions and structure that does not easily fit elsewhere. Some capabilities may even actively seek SOF sponsorship. Special operations and SOF necessarily change with the times, but additions to SOF structure should fit within the theoretical nature of special operations and SOF. The current use of enablers is one way of not diluting special operations capacity with incongruous structure, but leadership vigilance is required to discriminate between needed change and superfluous and counterproductive growth. This is not to say growth and change in SOF are objectionable, but that growth and change require careful management and that there are criteria and cautions suggested and supported by theory.

Conventional Forces Linkages

SOF and conventional force capabilities are complementary, integrative, and mutually supportive as instruments of national security pursuing common goals and objectives. As a result, SOF will continue to find itself in support of conventional force missions, and at times calling on conventional forces to support special operations. "There must be mutual understanding of the capabilities of both special operations forces and Conventional Forces, by commanders of both, and an understanding of their mutual limitations."[116]

In the 21st century security is a joint endeavor. The environment portends plenty for all to do: it is less a contest over who defines or owns what activity/mission and more of a question of how to best collaborate so SOF resources are expended where special operations capabilities are best used. There is a role conventional forces can play in unconventional operations and ways SOF can help prepare them to play these roles, even as both focus on other conventional and irregular requirements. Particularly, given that most state and non-state actors exercise power from and on land, USSOCOM and SOF must develop and sustain a close collaboration with the other combatant commands, land component commands, and the services in order to meet all the security environment challenges and preclude duplication of efforts,

or working at cross purposes. SOF theory points to where SOF can have the greatest strategic value.

Building Strategic Acumen—SOF Professional Education

Direct action as a principle highlights the linkage in SOF theory between strategic utility and tactical missions. The principle is achieved through a combination of strategic acumen and tactical proficiency—both are essential in understanding purpose, context, and the planning, rehearsal, and execution of missions. It is probably not possible to become too tactically proficient, but it is possible to become too tactically focused. SOF need to ask how to build strategic acumen and competencies in regard to special operations. It is important that SOF personnel continue to attend the service war colleges and senior enlisted education institutions—it builds an essential strategic perspective and establishes relationships that are critical to SOF's roles in national security. However, SOF should also look at the opposite side of the coin and ask how to develop SOF-specific strategic acumen and competencies. In *Educating for Strategic Thinking in the SOF Community: Considerations and a Proposal* (2007), this author made an argument for undertaking this that is one possibility.[117] The Joint SOF Leadership Competency Model offers potential competency objectives.[118] Whatever solution, theory suggests it should not be done in a manner that further disconnects SOF from conventional forces or the other higher educational requirements essential to a knowledgeable SOF.

A Precarious Special Operations Culture

All SOF are inherently precarious organizations for the numerous reasons outlined earlier. However, the barometer for the state of precariousness that should most concern leadership is SOF culture. The organizations with SOF vary greatly, but a shared special operations culture and identity permeate all to a degree, even habitual enablers. It is most closely identified with the special operator and is much deeper than any prima fascia elitism. It is a culture that advocates a particular SOF professionalism with a belief in quality over quantity, and embraces creativity, adaptability, flexibility, competency, less hierarchical structures, and performance in ways that differ from conventional forces. The characteristics and attributes of SOF culture are embedded in the theory presented, and it in no way devalues conventional

force cultures. Rather, SOF culture has its distinct foci and contextual meaning rooted in how special operations overcome friction as opposed to how conventional forces do. Any particular value, attribute, or characteristic might be embraced by either, but the implications vary significantly and the whole is distinct. Leadership should study theory to understand the role of SOF culture and monitor it for a measure of the wellbeing of the force. SOF culture must be managed for continued success.

Any reader of theory should pause and reflect on the implications of the theory for today and tomorrow. The concerns may differ from those expressed above, but theory would still have served its purpose.

7. Conclusion

As the United States confronts the remainder of the 21st century there will be no shortage of challenges or opportunities confronting it. Many of these will require the employment of military force in various ways. Conventional forces will be better suited for the larger and more conventional of these—deterrence, major combat, and other resource-intensive traditional security and humanitarian activities. However, increasingly state and non-state actors will pose security dilemmas for which the traditional instruments of U.S. national power are ill-suited, inappropriate, too slow, too risky, or too costly. More and more often SOF will be the logical instrument of choice, but it may well become an instrument of preference instead. The former infers a thoughtful consideration of SOF's capabilities and strategic, operational, and tactical utility: the latter may imply little more than a penchant. In the American school of thought, SOF is a part of the nation's military sword, but is better seen as a finely honed rapier forged over time from finite and rare metals. For the challenges of the 21st century, it must be kept sharpened and wielded with skill in the duels for which it is designed. A theory and school of thought informs us of how to keep the blade sharp and when and how to best use it.

This monograph concisely presents a way toward an American military theory of special operations and SOF. It argues that the U.S. viewpoint is distinct in how it defines special operations and SOF and the relationship between them, the evolution of SOF power, and the roles and relationships of SOF within the broader national security apparatus. Its definitions and 26 premises and 14 principles encapsulate what American special operations and SOF are and how they function together in an American model to serve national security. The content has been drawn or extrapolated from an emergent SOF literature and doctrine, only a part of which is highlighted herein. Consequently, it can be said that it offers nothing new. However, this would be too cursory a reading as its value lies in the bringing together and culling of multiple ideas into a theoretical construct of definitions, premises, and principles that are applicable to American special operations and SOF at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. As with any monograph, word length matters and much of what is offered herein would benefit from

greater explanation and illustration. Hopefully others will pursue this, confirming and challenging what is offered herein and further advancing the SOF body of knowledge. This monograph will also likely disappoint those who are looking for the revelation of an entirely "new" theory of special operations for the SOF-centric conditions of the 21st century. The focus of this monograph is to understand American special operations and SOF, and as argued the various pieces of, and foundation for a coherent "new" theory from a U.S. perspective have been evolving for several decades in the literature and practice. What is presented here may be useful in constructing a more general theory of special operations, but its "newness" will be found in its extrapolation and synthesis of existing thought, and what it offers to further a SOF strategic art.

Taken together, the school of thought and theory presented in this monograph seek to provide a strategic perspective of SOF power and special operations, and SOF's evolving role in U.S. national security. As the basis for a unified theory, it explains the relationship among SOF power, special operations, and SOF and other applicable theory and means of national security. It provides premises and principles that explain and apply to all of special operations and SOF. When applied to the past, it helps explain it, and it is applicable to current and future context. As a start, this monograph brings existing knowledge within the American SOF community into a concise unified theory framework and lays a basis for further work in theory and the practice of a SOF strategic art. However, much remains to be done.

Endnotes

1. Robert G. Spulak, Jr., *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Uses of SOF* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2007), 3.
2. William H. McRaven, *SPEC OPS Case Studies in Special Operations: Theory and Practice* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996). Admiral McRaven is currently commander, USSOCOM.
3. Full citation is Robert G. Spulak, Jr., *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Uses of SOF* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2007).
4. U.S. Special Operations Command, *U.S. Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012* (Tampa, Florida: U.S. Special Operations Command, 2012), 48.
5. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, D.C.: January 2012).
6. Such a debate has been ongoing internally within the SOF community as a missions debate for years and has been the subject of a number of conferences and studies. It was asked directly most recently at the Joint Special Operations University, *SOF-Power Workshop: A Way Forward for Special Operations Theory and Strategic Art*, August 2011. It has also played out in the Department of Defense and the most recent Defense Strategy with its strategic reliance on SOF capabilities.
7. This concern has been expressed at conferences and in discussions within individuals in which the author participated.
8. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 141.
9. United States Joint Forces Command, *The JOE 2010: Joint Operating Environment* (Norfolk, Virginia: USJFCOM Public Affairs, 2010), 4.
10. For an explanation of continuities and change, see Harry R. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger International Security, 2008), 23-24, 30-34, 39-40, 79.
11. United States Joint Forces Command, *The JOE 2010*, 12-37.
12. For an example of how this is portrayed, see United States Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment 2008: Challenges and Implications for Future Joint Forces* (Suffolk, Virginia: Center for Joint Futures, 2008), 20-21.
13. Ibid., 4.
14. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional*, 36, quoting Michael J. Mazarr, "Theory and U.S. Military Strategy: A 'Leapfrog' Strategy for U.S. Defense Policy," in *Complexity, Global Politics, and National Security*, ed. David S. Alberts and Thomas J. Czerwinski, 1997, http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Alberts_Complexity_Global.pdf , accessed on March 23, 2012, p. 138.

15. Ibid.
16. Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Phoenix, 2006), 378.
17. Ibid., 380-394.
18. Ibid., 382.
19. Summers is most remembered for his book, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Presidio Press, 1982), but he was a veteran of Korea and Vietnam, a part of the peace negotiation team for the latter; a lecturer; a columnist and pundit; an editor; and author of numerous other works.
20. Adapted from: John Hilton, "Peacekeeping at the Speed of Sound: The Relevancy of Airpower Doctrine in Operations Other Than War," *Airpower Journal* (Winter 1998); http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj98/apj98_images/hiln2.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj98/win98/hillen.html&h=510&w=575&sz=60&tbnid=Afh4Hq4o8fYnOM:&tbnh=90&tbnw=101&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dspectrum%2Bof%2Bconflict%26tbm%3Disch%26tbo%3Du&zoom=1&q=spectrum+of+conflict&docid=wu9oMV2KncprnM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=fLhsT9f_FpKCtgeBi9WPBg&sqi=2&ved=0CC4Q9QEwAA; accessed March 23, 2012. Hilton's diagram is adapted from Army Vision 2010 (Washington, D.C. Headquarters, Department of Army, November 1996), 5.
21. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional*, 63-68.
22. John B. Alexander, *The Changing Nature of Warfare, the Factors Mediating Future Conflict, and Implications for SOF* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2006), 1.
23. Ibid., 37.
24. National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A World Transformed* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, November 2008), 3.
25. Ibid., vii, 8-12.
26. Ibid., 19-26.
27. Ibid., 63.
28. Ibid., ix-xi, 29-36.
29. Ibid., xii, 31-32.
30. There are a number of ways of articulating the elements and instruments of power. For a discussion of several see Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional*, 68-67.
31. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, February 6, 2006), 19.
32. Ibid., iii-iv, 5-9.
33. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, D.C.: January 2012), 4.

34. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional*, 68-77.
35. This paradox is commonly referred to in international relations studies as the "security dilemma." For developed argument see Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), Chapter 6.
36. Ross S. Kelly, *Special Operations and National Purpose* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1989), 160-161. Bryan D. "Doug" Brown, "U.S. Special Operations Command: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century," Joint Forces Quarterly, 4th Quarter: Issue 40, 38-43, page 40. David Barno and Travis Sharp, "SOF Power," FP: Foreign Policy, February 14, 2012; available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/sof_power; accessed April 10, 2012.
37. The use of the term "General Purpose Forces" has been replaced by "Conventional Forces."
38. Brigadier General Joseph C. Lutz, at the time Commander of the 1st Special Operations Command, "Discussants," in Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., Special Operations in US Strategy (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), 47.
39. Ibid.
40. U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Publication I, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: June 1979, Revised).
41. Maurice Tugwell and David Charters, "Special Operations and the Threats to United States Interests in the 1980s," chapter in Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., Special Operations in US Strategy (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), 5.
42. DoD Dictionary of Military Terms; available at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/; accessed 30 November 2011.
43. DoD Dictionary of Military Terms.
44. Spulak, 16-18. He uses elite in a non-pejorative sense, meaning selected for SOF desirable attributes and developed for SOF desirable competencies.
45. Kelly, xvi-xvii.
46. Ibid., xvii.
47. Developed from research and discussion with Joseph Celeski at the Joint Special Operations University SOF-Power Workshop, MacDill AFB, Florida, 22-23 August 2011.
48. Edward Luttwak, et al., *A Systemic Review of "Commando" (Special Operations 1939-1980)* (Potomac, MD; C&L Associates, 1982), S-1, quoted in Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., Special Operations in US Strategy (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), 34.
49. Some have suggested SOF operate in the "human domain."
50. McRaven, 1.

51. Ibid., 4-9. For a fuller explanation of the theory and how it works see McRaven, 1-28, 381-391.
52. Ibid., 2-8.
53. Ibid., 8-23.
54. Ibid., 11.
55. Ibid., 9.
56. Lieutenant General Samuel Wilson, USA (Ret.), Discussants, in Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., *Special Operations in US Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), 192-194.
57. Spulak, 41.
58. Edward Luttwak, 34.
59. Spulak, 5-7. Spulak references Michael J. Mazarr, "Extremism, Terror, and the Future of Conflict," *Policy Review*, March 2006; available from www.policyreview.org; accessed November, 2006.
60. Ibid., 2.
61. Ibid., 10-14.
62. Ibid., 14-15.
63. Ibid., 21.
64. Ibid., 22-23.
65. Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups: Why SOF are the way SOF are* (Tampa: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2011), 7-11.
66. Ibid., 11.
67. Ibid., 2.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 1-3, 20-21, 27-28, 43-45.
70. Ibid., 55-56, 60-61, 65-67.
71. Ibid., 55-57, 59-62, 65-67.
72. Ibid., 66.
73. Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Tampa Joint Special Operations University Press, 2008) 2-3, 5-8, 12-27.
74. Ibid., 8.
75. Sean D. Naylor, "Adm Olson adds "lost" 5th SOF Truth to doctrine," Army Times, August 16, 2009,SOF Coast Blog, http://www.sofcoast.com/weblog/2009/09/adm-olsen-adds-lost-5th-sof-truth-to-doctrine.html; accessed March 21, 2012. John M. Collins, *U.S. and Soviet Special Operations*, House Armed Services Committee (Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress: Washington, D.C.1986).

76. USSOCOM Homepage, http://www.socom.mil/default.aspx; accessed January 21, 2012.
77. Naylor.
78. U.S. Army Special Operations Command, "SOF Imperatives," available at http://www.soc.mil/USASOC%20Headquarters/SOF%20Imperatives.html; accessed March 21, 2012.
79. A simple goggle search by service and values will provide multiple explanations of what the service values are, what they mean, and why they are important.
80. Eric T. Olson, USSOCOM Commander, Letter included in Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, 18 April 2011), iii. Admiral Olson also notes the five other joint publications for which his command is responsible and the ongoing effort to codify "SOF-specific" doctrine similar to service doctrine.
81. *Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations*, I-1.
82. Ibid., II-1.
83. Ibid., II-2.
84. Ibid., II-3.
85. Ibid., II-4—II-5.
86. Ibid., II-3.
87. The list is from Department of Defense Directive 5100.01, Functions of the Department of Defense and its Major Components, dated 21 December 2010 with definitions from *Joint Publication 1-02, DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, dated 08 November 2010, as amended through 15 November 2012. Another version of the list is found in *Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations*, dated April 2011, of which USSOCOM is the proponent and another version of the list, broken down into Core Activities and Core Operations, is provided in United States Operational Command, *USSOCOM Publication 1, Doctrine for Special Operations*, dated 9 August 2011. However, on 17 January 2013, the Force Management Directorate, USSOCOM, point of contact (Commander Adam Hudson) for drafting the new Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations indicated that the list of "Activities and Operations" in USSOCOM Publication 1 was being consolidated into a single list of activities and highly recommended that this author use the list from the from DODD 5100.01.
88. For a concise unclassified discussion of combatant commands, see Andrew Feickert, *The Unified Command Plan and Combatant Commands: Background and Issues for Congress*, July 17, 2012; available at http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42077.pdf; accessed October 3. 2012. USSOCOM is a Functional Combatant Command with primary responsibilities as a force provider to Geographic Combatant Commanders, but executes global operations when directed by President or Secretary of Defense.
89. USSOCOM Homepage.

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92. Developed from research and discussion with Joseph Celeski at the Joint Special Operations University SOF-Power Workshop, MacDill AFB, Florida, 22-23 August 2011.
93. Since the premises are drawn from preceding chapters where the contribution was acknowledged and modified by this author, citations are limited.
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95. William V. O'Brien, "Special Operations in the 1980s: American Moral, Legal, Political, and Cultural Constraints," chapter in Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), 55-56.
96. For one perspective of how this might be done see O'Brien, 53-80.
97. Sam C. Sarkesian, "Organizational Strategy and Low-Intensity Conflicts," chapter in Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), 263.
98. Lieutenant General Samuel Wilson, USA (Ret.), *Discussants*, in Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), 192.
99. Joseph Celeski, "A Theory of SOF," Briefing at the Joint Special Operations University SOF-Power Workshop, MacDill AFB, Florida, 22-23 August 2011.
100. Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups*, 59-62, 65-66.
101. Spulak, 17-18.
102. Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups*, 2-3.
103. Spulak, 10-13.
104. J.H. Huang, *Sun Tzu: The New Translation* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1993), 40-41, 45-46. This particular edition and the references illustrate this point well and include enemy and friendly examples.
105. Sarkesian, 265-266.
106. Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream*.

107. Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), 5.

108. Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream*, 2-3, 12-19. See also Eliot A. Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians: Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies*, Harvard Studies in International Affairs, No. 40 (Harvard University: Center for International Affairs, 1978) for conventional balance.

109. Ibid., 2-3, 12-19.

110. Ibid., 2-3, 12-19.

111. These principles are drawn, extrapolated, and synthesized from works acknowledged in preceding chapters and other mentors, consequently citations are limited to avoid confusion and save space.

112. *Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations*, "Appendix A: Principles of Joint Operations," 11 August 2011, http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_0.pdf; accessed March 15, 2012. A-2. This is the latest statement of the principle of mass which de-emphasis forces in favor of combat effects.

113. McRaven, 1-8.

114. Ross S. Kelly in *Special Operations and National Purpose, xvii-xviii*, argues the principles are not substantially different, but the frames of reference, mission goals and constraints "require significantly different priorities in the application of the common operational principles." Kelly's point is valid, but the question is whether for SOF theory is it useful to articulate the principles in a more useful way that better informs.

115. Andrew Feickert, "U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service (Washington, D.C.: March 23, 2012).

116. Marsh, 23.

117. Harry R. Yarger, *Educating for Strategic Thinking in the SOF Community: Considerations and a Proposal* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, January 2007). See also Colonel (Ret) Joseph D. Celeski, "Special Operations & Strategic Art—Enhancing Force Application," Unpublished Joint Special Operations University Staff Paper, 2011.

118. Joint Special Operations University Homepage, "[Joint SOF Leadership] Competency Model Explained," available at https://jsou.socom.mil/Pages/Default.aspx; accessed April 10, 2012.