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On
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* The views expressed in this testimony are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Defense Department or the National Defense University.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and share some observations on the future of United States Special Operations Forces. It is now evident to most observers that Congress acted wisely, boldly, and with great foresight when it passed legislation to create the U.S. Special Operations Command and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict. I believe this subcommittee is just as well-advised to continue following developments in our nation's Special Operations Forces (SOF). These forces are now well-recognized for their major role in safeguarding American security over the past decade. Arguably they can play an even greater role in the future.

To explain why and how that might be the case, I will address the following questions:

- What types of SOF are needed to deal with current and emerging challenges over the next ten years – and what obstacles impede advancement in this area?
- Is SOF achieving a balance between direct and indirect operational approaches to achieve strategic objectives?
- Are our Special Operations Forces properly organized, trained, and equipped to meet future threats?
- How should current authorities, resourcing, and force structure change to better enable SOF to deal with emerging challenges and integrate SOF into the Joint Force of 2020?
- What changes should be considered to U.S. Special Operations Command and the interagency so that Special Operations Forces remain agile, globally persistent, and aligned with national strategy?

In answering these questions, I will draw upon previous research as well as informed opinion from current and former members of the SOF community who have been kind enough to share their insights.

What Kind of SOF are Needed?

The nation needs SOF guided by a strong strategic concept that explains how, when, and where SOF are the best choice to manage or defeat a security threat, and thus how SOF should be trained, equipped and employed.¹ SOF's strategic concept, and the strategic value they offer within that concept, evolves along with the security challenges facing the nation, our strategy for meeting those challenges, and the distinguishing characteristics of SOF. It is now commonplace to note that the security challenges we face are increasingly complex, multidimensional, enduring, irregular and often best met with operations short of war.

One distinguishing feature of such complex missions is that they require a different understanding of the central purpose of tactical combat operations. As we have discovered in the past, but often forget, in complex contingencies “the goal is to gain decisive results with the least application of force and the consequent minimum loss of life” rather than “striving to generate the maximum power with forces available.”² An offensive spirit in tactical operations is necessary when operating against irregular threats; however the purpose is not to destroy the irregular forces so much as it is to keep them on the defensive until other elements of the strategy successfully isolate them from popular support and they cease to be a serious threat. Even small terrorists groups intent on using weapons of mass destruction that must be destroyed before they can do so are less of a threat if they do not enjoy popular support. Recognizing the

¹ Much of the argumentation here is taken from David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, U.S. Special Operations Forces, Columbia University Press, 2007.

² U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940), chapter I, 1-9(f), 1-16(c); Chapter II, 2-5.

cost and complexity of current security challenges, and particularly irregular threats, our national security strategy emphasizes the need to work in collaboration with allies and friendly forces abroad, and to integrate all elements of our national power when doing so. This is true particularly for meeting the threat of catastrophic terrorism, but also for other security challenges such as international piracy, cyber threats, and insurgencies.

These types of security threats, and our strategy for meeting them, engender missions that are well suited for SOF's distinctive characteristics, but also levy requirements for unprecedented levels of political and technical sophistication, including interagency cooperation. Before addressing some of the current challenges SOF must address, it is helpful to briefly summarize the distinctive characteristics of SOF that make them well suited to complex and irregular security challenges. Doing so makes it easier to navigate some of the difficult issues that must be addressed when considering a way forward for the future of SOF.

Some SOF characteristics evolve over time. For example, some of the unconventional capabilities SOF might need to incorporate now could include computer network attack and how to neutralize a weapon of mass destruction in the field. However, there are some core attributes of U.S. SOF that are of enduring importance. The most basic distinguishing characteristic of SOF is that they are special rather than just elite. Elite units are used for the same purpose as general-purpose forces, but receive special designation, training and resources so they may perform at a higher level. In contrast, Special Operations Forces conduct missions that conventional forces cannot perform, either at all or within acceptable levels of risk and costs. Although it can be difficult to distinguish special from elite military forces, making the distinction correctly increases the

chances that SOF will be well prepared and correctly employed for their most important missions.

Whereas the Services are distinguished from one another primarily by their physical operating environment (land, air, sea, amphibious or littoral environments), SOF are distinguished from the Services by their conceptual and physical distance from conventional forces and/or their proximity to indigenous forces and populations. When SOF operate behind enemy lines, in close contact with indigenous forces and populations, or under special political constraints, such as the need to avoid collateral casualties in a close-quarters combat, they are either physically and/or conceptually removed from conventional force operations and their organic mass and firepower. Because they operate in these unique environments, SOF have special requirements:

- Political Sophistication. Special operations are conducted in a politically sensitive context that constrains virtually every aspect of the operation. Local mores may dictate methods, and political considerations may require clandestine, covert or low-visibility techniques as well as oversight at the national level. SOF must be prepared to work closely with political authorities and be capable of using good judgment in a fast-evolving and politically sensitive environment.
- Uncommon Will to Succeed. Special operations often are conducted under extreme duress that requires an uncommon commitment to persevere. Accordingly, SOCOM emphasizes that it takes special individuals to succeed in special operations; individuals who are determined to persist in the face of adversity and without support.
- Unorthodox approaches. SOCOM also stresses creativity as a core value because special operations require creative approaches to problem solving that sometimes defy American norms and military doctrine without violating fundamental American values. For example, in contrast to conventional force operations, surprise achieved by innovative approaches that utilize speed, stealth, audacity, and deception is far more important than mass in special operations. Similarly, creative approaches to working with indigenous populations

and forces are a norm for SOF, whereas conventional forces generally try to minimize such contact. Some techniques pioneered by SOF may be passed along to conventional forces once they are perfected, but others require so much training that they cannot be employed efficiently or effectively by larger conventional forces.

- Unconventional equipment and training. The definition of “unconventional” changes over time. Night-vision devices and body armor pioneered by SOF are no longer considered unconventional and are now used by general purpose forces. However, SOF continue to develop capabilities that are unconventional in comparison with conventional forces in order to help achieve surprise or overcome obstacles in rapidly evolving circumstances.
- Special intelligence requirements. Special operations either take advantage of indigenous forces or exploit enemy weaknesses that are not readily apparent. In either case SOF require special intelligence. SOF need fine-grained intelligence to attack a difficult target with precision. They also need special insights into foreign mores, and local social and political relationships, to work effectively through indigenous forces and populations.

All SOF missions—whether it is direct action, civil affairs, hostage rescue, counterinsurgency training, unconventional warfare or foreign internal defense—require forces with these special attributes, albeit in different degrees. This is often disputed and a point of controversy. For example, sometimes it is asserted that SOF direct action missions only require men with uncommon drive and not political sophistication. This assertion is contradicted by historical experience and scholarship. Conducted incorrectly, direct action missions can cause high civilian casualties or other unwanted side effects that cancel out benefits obtained by the use of force. Similarly, some might argue that Civil Affairs or Psychological Operations only require personnel with political sophistication and not uncommon drive. Although such forces do not require the ability to prevail in physically challenging circumstances, they do require the ability to persist in rapidly evolving circumstances where the definition of success is often not clear and constantly being revised.

These special characteristics are what separate SOF from conventional forces, and explain why conventional forces cannot accomplish SOF missions either at all or within the limits of acceptable costs and risks. These special characteristics explain why SOF interoperability with conventional forces can be quite a good thing—many security threats will require SOF and conventional forces acting in concert. However, these special, distinguishing characteristics also explain why the interchange of SOF and conventional forces is neither helpful nor possible (by which I mean SOF being used to perform general purpose force missions or vice versa). If SOF are used for conventional force missions, their special attributes are wasted; and if conventional forces are used to conduct special operations, they will perform poorly or fail.

One final distinction about SOF special characteristics must be made. All SOF missions and forces share, in greater or lesser amounts, the special characteristics that distinguish them from conventional forces. However, SOF can execute their missions directly themselves or they can conduct their missions working by, with, or through indigenous forces and populations. A number of terms have been used to describe these two approaches to SOF mission accomplishment, but the terms “direct” and “indirect” are now commonplace. SOF can use their direct and indirect approaches separately or in combination, but must be equally proficient at both.

Technically all SOF missions may be conducted directly or indirectly but some tend to align better with the direct or indirect approaches. For example, SOF can train a foreign force to conduct direct action, but when US interests are directly engaged and the results really matter, the tendency is to desire more control over the outcome and therefore to have

U.S. SOF complete the mission directly. Similarly, SOF can conduct foreign internal defense directly, but the need for local intelligence and knowledge of popular sentiments and the political value of allowing local forces to conduct the mission usually argue in favor of the indirect approach. In this respect certain SOF missions tend to align better with the direct or indirect approach, even though all SOF missions can be executed either way.

It is important to distinguish between SOF's direct and indirect approaches because each approach entails different advantages and disadvantages. Often it is assumed that acting directly means employing lethal force and acting indirectly means employing non-lethal capabilities. In fact, both approaches can involve lethal and non-lethal skills. The more important differences involve costs and control. In general, acting indirectly entails lower costs but also offers less control over means employed and outcomes achieved. Acting directly can involve higher costs but provides more control over the means employed and ends achieved. The risks associated with either approach depend on the nature of the security problem and the strategy devised in response.

To elaborate, when SOF directly undertake a mission it is more likely that it will be well-coordinated with other US military operations and activities, carried out with high competence and full commitment, and completed consistent with US objectives and values. Some SOF missions cannot be worked through foreign forces with an acceptable chance of success. Even highly competent foreign special operations forces may fail if their political leadership is not fully in agreement with the United States about the value of the operation. Employing SOF directly also means that the success or failure of the effort will redound primarily to the credit or discredit of the United States. Whether this is advantageous or not depends on the political situation.

There are also advantages and disadvantages to SOF acting indirectly. The obvious advantage to working through foreign forces and populations is that it reduces the resource and political commitment of the United States. Sometimes the scale of the problem precludes a direct approach. When there are not enough SOF or other US forces to meet mission requirements, then SOF must work at least to some extent indirectly through advice and training to foreign forces. The indirect approach also has the advantage of a lower profile. Sometimes, it is better to work through foreign forces and populations because they can provide the necessary intelligence about insurgents, terrorists or other adversaries. In such cases, trying to solve the problem directly with US forces can create resentment and resistance that is counterproductive for U.S. objectives.

Another reason it is important to distinguish between SOF's direct and indirect approaches is that they require differing degrees of emphasis on various SOF skill sets. Conducting missions indirectly requires greater specialization in what some have termed SOF's "warrior-diplomat" or "cross-cultural" skill sets, which require a deeper understanding of indigenous forces and populations. Conducting SOF missions directly requires more refined technical skill sets peculiar to each SOF mission, particularly those highly specialized capabilities involved in direct action behind enemy lines. In short, for SOF to be well prepared for indirect and direct missions, some SOF units must weight their training and equipment toward warrior-diplomat skills. Other units, however, need to concentrate on what some refer to as the SOF "commando" skill sets, which Admiral McRaven recently explained require "technologically-

enabled small-unit precision lethality, focused intelligence, and interagency cooperation integrated on a digitally-networked battlefield.”³

Having made these distinctions it is easier to summarize the kind of SOF the United States needs to meet future security challenges. We need SOF that operate with the benefit of a clear strategic concept, one that emphasizes their value relative to general purposes forces but does not confuse the two. We need SOF that are fully imbued with all the attributes that make SOF special compared to general purpose forces, and that are fully capable of executing their missions either directly or indirectly.

Are We Balancing SOF Direct and Indirect Approaches?

We have done a better job of balancing SOF direct and indirect approaches in the past six years than in the years immediately following the terror attacks on 9/11. However, we still need more attention to the indirect approach. There are multiple reasons why we have not been as successful using SOF indirectly as directly. Following 9/11, national leaders were intent on direct strategies that did not leave much room for SOF indirect approaches. Military leaders also were reluctant to commit to SOF indirect approaches. In some cases, SOF were pushed to the sideline after initial successes; in other cases priority was given to SOF units using the direct approach and direct action in particular. Finally, USSOCOM leaders were slow to recognize the value of SOF’s indirect approach.

In general the balance between SOF direct and indirect approaches has been much better in recent years, roughly since 2006. The debate over their respective value and how they might fit with national strategy is

³ Posture Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven, USN, Commander, United States Special Operations Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March, 6, 2012, p. 5

far from over, but national leaders now emphasize the value of the indirect approach more, as do senior military leaders. The past few USSOCOM commanders have emphasized the distinction and merits of both approaches, and have repeatedly testified to Congress that they are committed to building capacity for and using both approaches.⁴

In areas accorded less priority than Afghanistan and Iraq, such as the Philippines, SOF were allowed, or forced by limited resources, to approach their missions indirectly and have done so with great success. In Iraq, after approaching the brink of disaster, U.S. forces were able to turn the war around in part because SOF better balanced its direct and indirect approaches, and did so in close cooperation with conventional forces that had learned why irregular threats require a multidimensional approach that gives priority to population security, interagency cooperation and close collaboration with indigenous forces.⁵ In Afghanistan, we have been less successful in balancing SOF direct and indirect approaches;⁶ although by some accounts we are now moving in this direction.⁷

One enduring reason for the difficulty we have in balancing SOF direct and indirect approaches is lack of respect for how difficult the indirect approach is. Training foreign forces is not difficult. Working with foreign forces to achieve security objectives shared by their government and ours in ways that are consistent with U.S. interests and values is

⁴ See Adm. McRaven testimony in Hearing of the House Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities: *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces: Ten Years After 9/11 and Twenty-Five Years After Goldwater-Nichols*, September 22, 2011; and Adm. Olson testimony in Hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities: *Hearing to Receive Testimony on U.S. Special Operations Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2010 and the Future Years Defense Program*, June 18, 2009.

⁵ See Christopher J. Lamb and Evan Munsing, *Secret Weapon: High-value Target Teams as an Organizational Innovation*, INSS Strategic Perspectives No. 4 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2011).

⁶ Christopher J. Lamb and Martin Cinnamond, "Unity of Effort: Key to Success in Afghanistan." *Strategic Forum* No. 248, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, October, 2009.

⁷ Associated Press, "Wraps Come Off Special Operations Afghan War Plan," April 12, 2012, available through FoxNews.com: <<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/04/12/wraps-come-off-special-operations-afghan-war-plan/>>.

extremely hard. There has been a tendency for conventional force commanders to assume their forces can relieve SOF of its indirect activities, particularly training and working with foreign forces. Worse, some SOF commanders have agreed and shunned such missions in favor of direct action. When this happens, both types of forces are saying they do not believe working “by, with and through” host nation forces requires special skills, which is incorrect.

There is nothing inherently wrong with current plans to align Army forces along regional lines.⁸ The Army can and should improve its ability to work with regional partners; however it cannot approach the language training and cultural skills embodied by SOF without unduly sacrificing the proficiency at large scale maneuver combat that makes it the world’s best land force. Competency in these areas requires a great deal of time, effort, and special personnel. Even if conventional forces could be trained to SOF-standards, they would lose their large conventional force-on-force competencies in the process. For this reason it is always best to try to conduct foreign internal defense and other indirect SOF missions without resorting to conventional forces. If the problem is so dire it requires conventional force employment, then the conventional forces should support SOF. In this regard there have been positive developments. SOF have been allowed to take the strategic lead, and even command general purpose forces in Afghanistan.⁹ Conventional force support of SOF engaged in defeating irregular threats is a positive precedent, one that hopefully can be extended in the future to support for SOF employing indirect approaches.

⁸ Paul McLeary, “U.S. Army Will Focus on Training, Partnering With SOF: Odierno,” June 20, 2012, DefenseNews.com, Available at: <<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120620/DEFREG02/306200008/U-S-Army-Will-Focus-Training-Partnering-SOF-Odierno>>.

⁹ Former Commander, USSOCOM, Adm. Eric T. Olson noted such examples in congressional testimony. See “Posture Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olson, USN Commander United States Special Operations Command,” Senate Armed Services Committee, March 1, 2011, available at <<http://www.dod.mil/dodgc/olc/docs/testOlson03012011.pdf/>>.

Looking to the future, the major challenges for USSOCOM leaders interested in balancing SOF direct and indirect approaches and capabilities are two-fold. SOF must maintain the unprecedented direct action capabilities built up and employed directly against terrorists and insurgent organizations over the past decade. At the same time, SOF must reorient, reinforce and build up their indirect skills. Both these challenges must be met during a period of declining Department of Defense budgets, and during a period when the consensus on the need to attack terrorist organizations directly is weakening. In such an environment it will be much more difficult than is generally appreciated to ensure SOF are organized, prepared and supported with a proper balance between SOF direct and indirect approaches.

Are Special Operations Forces properly organized, trained, equipped and supported?

Looking first to the direct approach, SOF leaders understand well that our national mission units and their ability to pursue terrorists directly across the globe are dependent upon a substantial array of combat service and combat service support capabilities. This global infrastructure has been built up over the past decade primarily through supplemental defense funding for overseas contingency operations. SOF depends on conventional force support in logistics, strategic airlift, depot maintenance, and many other areas. These capabilities are not provided for in the core budget and will be difficult to retain merely for the benefit of SOF. As Service budgets contract, the Services naturally will work hard to protect their core competencies and much of the support they have provided for SOF direct action will be placed in reserve or disappear entirely. For just one example, the Air Force will be tempted to trim back its fleet of unmanned aerial vehicles and the processing, exploitation, and dissemination capability that make these platforms so useful in support of SOF operations.

In such circumstances, SOF leaders will be tempted to simply move desired support capabilities into MFP-11 funding accounts. In a few cases doing so will be preferable to losing the capability altogether. However, SOF will have to be careful to avoid enduring budgetary commitments for support operations that it cannot efficiently manage and that likely are unsustainable over the long term except at the expense of eroding SOF primary capabilities. During the 1990s SOF made the mistake of assuming budgetary responsibility for the Coastal Patrol Boat, a great irregular war capability that it could not afford and ultimately had to abandon. SOF faces a similar challenge today in negotiating support capabilities and costs with the Services. During the upcoming period of severe austerity, SOF cannot be independent of Service support. Determining what USSOCOM must have as opposed to what it would be nice to have, and what the Services will provide rather than what SOF will have to obtain and maintain itself, will be a critical challenge that will require close cooperation between USSOCOM and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, and between the Pentagon and Congress more generally.

SOF also will face another challenge in retaining its tremendous counterterrorism direct action capabilities. To its credit, SOF has pioneered unprecedented levels of interagency collaboration in support of its direct action capabilities. It is not possible to attack terrorists without knowing their location, and knowing their location requires the fusion of many intelligence disciplines. Accordingly, SOF has forged a remarkable level of interagency cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Initially SOF invested in interagency collaboration simply to permit better targeting of the enemy, but over time SOF discovered that interagency collaboration also permits a better understanding of the political, information and operational consequences of attacking targets. The level of interagency

collaboration SOF has managed to build up is simply astounding. It is also a much more fragile and transitory capability than most appreciate.

If history is a guide, other departments and agencies that were willing to compromise or subordinate their organizational missions to SOF for the purpose of attacking terrorists and insurgent leaders will become less willing to do so in the future. When large scale military operations are underway overseas, intelligence agencies and the Department of State are more inclined to support the military taking the lead. Even in these circumstances we have discovered just how difficult and erratic interagency collaboration can be. Now, with Osama Bin Laden eliminated, and military operations drawing down from overseas contingencies, first in Iraq and now in Afghanistan, we can expect departments and agencies to retreat from some of the interagency support they have offered for SOF direct action. The Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency will be particularly predisposed to reassert their prerogatives.

In addition to maintaining essential direct action capabilities built up over the past decade, SOF will need to place renewed emphasis on its ability to conduct missions indirectly. SOF indirect approaches and capabilities are every bit as valuable and challenging to build, maintain and employ as SOF direct approaches and capabilities. In the future, SOF indirect capabilities should be valued even more highly by national and SOF leadership because there is now much greater appreciation for our national resource limitations and for the value of working in collaboration with allies and friendly forces. It will be difficult for SOF leaders to deliver indirect SOF capabilities for several reasons.

First, the new generation of SOF that entered the force after 9/11 is accustomed to unprecedented levels of support for SOF direct action. The national imperative to prevent a repeat of 9/11 and the exceptional latitude afforded SOF direct action missions has captured the attention of

our entire nation but also the entire SOF community. Many SOF recruits joined the force specifically in order to participate in such operations. In fact, some SOF experts have argued that the allure of direct action has helped fill depleted SOF ranks and that the recruits are disappointed when assigned to units that traditionally focus more on the indirect approach.¹⁰

Thus even SOF units that traditionally demonstrate greater appreciation for indirect approaches have been inclined to focus more on direct action against terrorists and insurgent leaders. For example, in Iraq it sometimes proved difficult to get Army Special Forces to agree to partner with Iraqi Security Forces. Similarly, many Special Forces units in Afghanistan also have given a priority to working directly against the enemy rather than doing so through indigenous forces. By no means is this trend universal in Special Forces. There are many instances where experienced Special Forces officers had proven the key to a successful indirect use of SOF.¹¹ However, the trend is pronounced enough to indicate that USSOCOM will be challenged to reorient Special Forces and other SOF units that historically specialize in indirect approaches to ensure they are well prepared to actually operate this way. Working by, with and through indigenous forces and populations has not received the priority attention in the field that senior commander expressions of support for the indirect approach would suggest should be the case, and it will be difficult to reverse this trend. According to some experts, it will even require adjusting the SOF selection process. It has been argued

¹⁰ Anna Simons, "SOF 2030: An Naval Postgraduate School Defense Analysis Seminar Report," March 2012, p. 4. The study was conducted by Professor Simons and 13 other SOF experts, including 4 SEALs; 4 Special Forces officers; 1 Special Forces Warrant Officer; 1 Combat Controller; 1 Marine; 1 Air Force pilot (who's flown both B-1s and Predators); and an Electronic Warfare Weapons School graduate.

¹¹ See Lamb and Munsing, "Secret Weapon," p. 23, and Lamb and Cinnamond, "Unity of Effort," p. 7. Secret Weapon also notes Special Forces officers who were instrumental in supporting the indirect approach. For other celebrated example of Special Forces using the indirect approach to good effect see Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2004 and William Doyle, *A Soldier's Dream: Captain Travis Patriquin and the Awakening of Iraq*. New York: New American Library, 2011.

recently that SOF “needs to get much more serious about who it needs for its ‘by, with, and through’ forces: namely...highly adaptable thinkers with a depth and breadth of life experience, some of which should probably come from ventures outside the military.”¹²

USSOCOM will also need to rebuild SOF language and cross-cultural skill sets applicable to parts of the world other than Iraq and Afghanistan, which have absorbed more than eight-five percent of SOF personnel over the past decade.¹³ SOF, particularly but not exclusively Army Special Forces, have sacrificed area orientation, language proficiency, and cultural appreciation within their assigned regions since 9/11. The operational demands of the Iraq and Afghan theaters led to a substantial degradation of SOF indirect skills. Reconstituting these critical capabilities will require significant investment and time and will be a leadership and management challenge.

Similarly, USSOCOM needs to improve the ability of its military information support forces (which used to be called psychological operations forces), to support SOF indirect approaches. Like all SOF, military information support forces can make contributions in major combat operations as well as irregular war, but their contribution is more critical to the success of the latter.¹⁴ Success in irregular warfare often depends upon separating irregular enemies from the general population, and SOF can make major contributions toward this end. Making a significant impact in irregular warfare though information management is a demanding enterprise, and historically USSOCOM has not invested sufficient leadership, time and resources to ensure its military information

¹² Anna Simons, “SOF 2030,” p. 4.

¹³ Hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities: *Hearing to Receive Testimony on U.S. Special Operations Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2010 and the Future Years Defense Program*, June 18, 2009.

¹⁴ See Christopher J. Lamb with Paris Genalis, Review of Psychological Operations Lessons Learned from Recent Operational Experience, Occasional Paper, National Defense University Press, September 2005.

support forces are up to the task. Military information operations deal with human attitudes and motivations in a cross-cultural setting. Arguably, such operations are among the most complex work that SOF performs. Yet the selection process for these forces is not nearly as rigorous as it is for other SOF. Also, relative to the work that SOF military information support specialists must do, their training is minimal. Improving their ability to make a consistent impact in operations against irregular threats is another major challenge for SOF leadership.

One way to improve the SOF's indirect skills would be to give USSOCOM additional assets that could specialize in open source socio-cultural knowledge accumulation. It has been argued that our enemies are much more at home in our world than we are in theirs, which gives them a strategic advantage.¹⁵ Terrorists understand our vulnerabilities and how to exploit them better than we do theirs. They also tend to recruit and draw support from among their immediate social circle of trust, and it is difficult for us to disrupt these sources of support if we do not understand the socio-cultural context within which they occur. Learning again the value of deep socio-cultural knowledge, the U.S. Army invested substantial assets in improving its ability to understand "human terrain" over the past decade. It created a Human Terrain System but placed it within the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, which was ill-suited to support the capability.¹⁶ The Human Terrain System program is now being curtailed to save resources and it is an open question whether the knowledge painfully acquired by the program will be retained. It should be, and USSOCOM or its component command, the U.S. Army

¹⁵ David Tucker and Christopher Lamb, "Restructuring Special Operations Forces for Emerging Threats," *Strategic Forum* No. 219, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, January 2006.

¹⁶ This was reported in a congressionally mandated study. See Yvette Clinton, Virginia Foran-Cain, Julia Voelker McQuaid, Catherine E. Norman, and William H. Sims, with Sara M. Russell, *Congressionally Directed Assessment of the Human Terrain System*, CNA Analysis & Solutions, November 2010, p. 3.

Special Operations Command, might be a better organizational fit for the program.¹⁷

The Human Terrain System and its deployable teams could help prepare SOF for their deployments in peacetime as well as war, alerting them to key figures in traditional networks and about local attitudes and relationships that are important to the success of SOF indirect approaches. They could also assist SOF military information support operations, including their support to U.S. embassies. Properly resourced and trained, they could serve as linguistic and social interpreters for other U.S. forces as well, supporting major combat operations when required but focused especially on irregular warfare.

SOF needs interagency collaboration as much or even more for its indirect as its direct approach to securing strategic objectives. Engineering interagency collaboration will be just as challenging for the indirect missions as the direct, albeit for different reasons. Other departments and agencies typically are better disposed to SOF efforts to work with indigenous forces because host nation governments prefer this approach. However, SOF has not exercised or resourced its indirect skills in the interagency context nearly as rigorously as it has its direct approach. Moreover, maintaining Congressional support, and therefore resources, for a sustained indirect strategy may be challenging.

In the distant and near past SOF have conducted major indirect campaigns successfully, but not without complications. Earlier this decade it was briefly popular to refer to SOF's successful indirect approach to counterinsurgency as the "El Salvador" model. Even though Special Forces successfully executed an indirect response to insurgency in

¹⁷ The witness and three other researchers at National Defense University are close to finishing a year long study on the Human Terrain Teams that explains the reasons for their variable performance, why the large majority of commanders found them useful, and why they collectively were unable to make a major contribution to the counterinsurgency effort.

El Salvador, those responsible for managing the effort reported that obtaining interagency collaboration and sustained resources were major problems.¹⁸ More recently, SOF have worked well with indigenous forces in Colombia and the Philippines, but again, not without complications. For example, according to one authoritative source, the mission in the Philippines almost was stillborn because of objections from the Department of Defense. However, the willingness of SOF to work through the U.S. Ambassador's country team and insistence on working with the host nation forces were two indispensable requirements for success that SOF met, and they constitute a sound model for expanding SOF indirect activities in the future.¹⁹

How should SOF authorities, resourcing, and force structure change?

News reports and recent congressional testimony suggest the Commander, USSOCOM is seeking additional authority and resources for two notable initiatives, which may be related.²⁰ The details are obscure, but in the first case, USSOCOM apparently wants to streamline deployment processes so SOF can congregate with greater agility in response to evolving circumstances, and particularly in response to terrorist activities. In briefly describing the initiative, Admiral McRaven emphasized that SOF would not move without concurrence from Geographic Combatant Commanders and the Department of State.²¹ USSOCOM also is interested in increasing the authority and funding for

¹⁸ Corr, Edwin G, and Stephen Sloan. *Low-intensity Conflict: Old Threats in a New World*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992, pp. 33-35; 230ff.

¹⁹ David S. Maxwell, Statement to the House Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities. *Understanding Future Irregular Warfare Challenges*, March 27, 2012, p. 24; see also David. S. Maxwell, "Foreign Internal Defense: An Indirect Approach to Counter-Insurgency/Counter Terrorism, Lessons from Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines for dealing with Non-Existential Threats to the United States." Proc. of Irregular Warfare Challenges and Opportunities, Conference of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, Washington, DC. December 6, 2011. 8.

²⁰ Eric Schmitt, Mark Mazzetti and Thom Shanker, "Admiral Seeks Freer Hand in Deployment of Elite Forces, The New York Times, February 12, 2012.

²¹ See Adm. McRaven testimony in Hearing of the House Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities: *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces: Ten Years After 9/11 and Twenty-Five Years After Goldwater-Nichols*, September 22, 2011.

Geographic Combatant Commands' Theater Special Operations Commands. Admiral McRaven testified that he wanted to build up the Theater Special Operations Commands "so that they have the entire spectrum of capability that I think they will need for the future."²² Later reports indicate that Admiral McRaven's proposals included "regional security coordination centers, organized and structured similarly to NATO SOF Headquarters,"²³ and new authority to train and equip foreign security forces. The new authority to train and equip was not approved,²⁴ but the Secretary of State has gone out of her way to make her support for a partnership with USSOCOM known.²⁵

Without knowing the details, and considering that these proposals are still under review, it is hard to comment. I know friends of the SOF community who are worried about expansion of SOF authorities and resources. They believe it might undermine the fragile interagency collaboration SOF has done so much to advance over the past decade, and also are concerned that new authorities and resources would only be used to further imbalance SOF in favor of its direct approach. In this regard, it should be noted that in the past the Theater Special Operations Commands have argued that they are under resourced by USSOCOM for their highly important indirect activities. They often argue that the SOF emphasis on direct action needs to be complemented with the requirement to "understand" the operating environment better and act indirectly. Theater Special Operations Commands can provide better and more current understanding of the local operating environment if properly resourced and supported by USSOCOM.

²² Senate Armed Services Committee: Hearing on the Proposed Fiscal 2013 Defense Authorization as it Relates to the U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command, March 6, 2012.

²³ Barbara Opall-Rome, "U.S. Seeks Global Spec Ops Network," *Defense News*, 12 May 2012, available at <<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120512/DEFREG02/305120003>>.

²⁴ Eric Schmitt, "Elite Military Forces are Denied in Bid for Expansion," *The New York Times*, June 4, 2012.

²⁵ Paul McLeary, "State, DoD Command Forge Unlikely Partnership," *Federal Times*, June 4, 2012.

Taking Admiral McRaven's initiatives at face value, I believe they deserve attention and support. The USSOCOM initiative to increase resources for Theater Special Operations Commands is long over due. I also consider it a positive development that USSOCOM wants to pursue a trans-regional counterterrorist strategy with greater alacrity and in close cooperation with Geographic Combatant Commands, the Department of State, and presumably other interagency partners. Those charged with responsibility for national policy and strategy must ensure that counterterrorism strategy objectives strike the right balance among competing objectives, including the mix of direct and indirect SOF missions, and that Theater Special Operations Commands work as hard on interagency collaboration as SOF special mission units have.

My note of caution concerns resources. Better resourcing the Theater Special Operations Commands may require difficult tradeoffs. USSOCOM may be over optimistic about the resources available to SOF in the coming decade. It needs to consider some areas for cost-saving reductions. One possible area is the Army Special Forces force structure. As operational tempo recedes and Special Forces reclaim their indirect skills sets for diverse regions around the world, some of the fourth battalions added to Special Forces Groups might be reduced. Through careful management, Special Forces could retain personnel with the greatest indirect skills, and thus build up this scarce capability faster than otherwise would be the case. Reducing force structure would also allow a personnel float that would permit more time with families and allow longer periods of training to regain eroded skill sets.

What USSOCOM and interagency changes should be considered?

Both SOF direct and indirect approaches depend upon high levels of interagency collaboration. As noted, it will be just as challenging to secure and maintain interagency support for indirect missions as it has

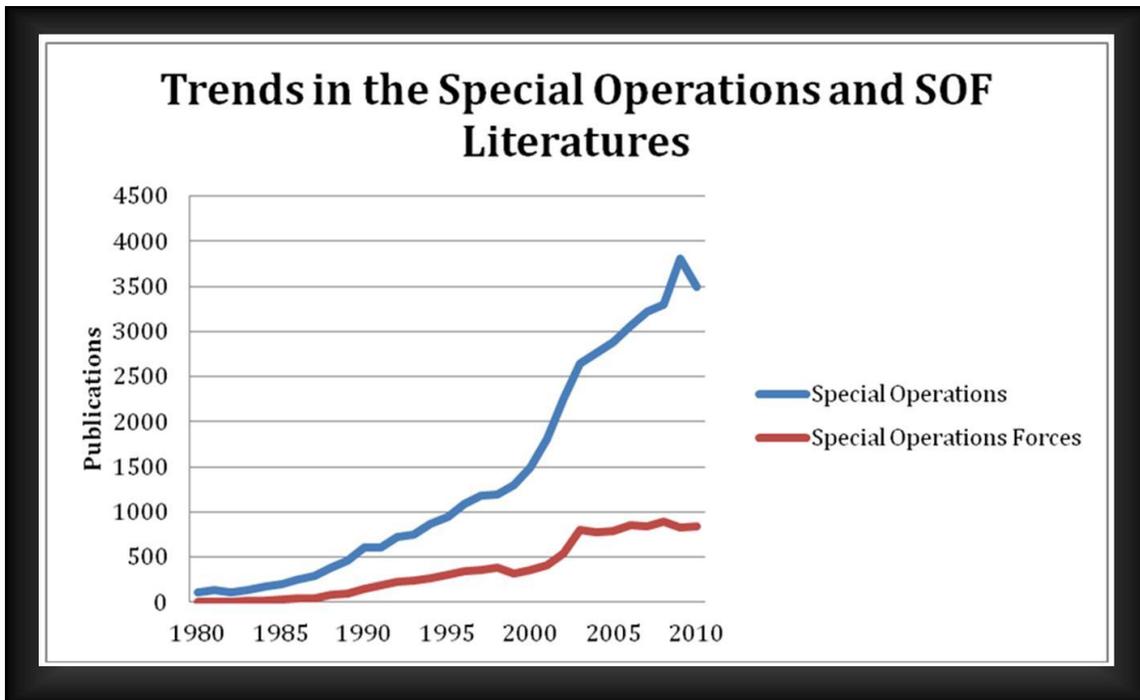
been for direct action. SOF facilitated interagency collaboration for its direct approach to counterterrorism with an extensive network of costly SOF personnel placed in other departments and agencies, and by covering much of the cost associated with collaboration in the field. Such resources are typically not available for SOF's indirect efforts, and it will be especially difficult to obtain them in the current resource-constrained environment. In the future, sustaining interagency collaboration this way, for either SOF direct or indirect approaches, may be cost prohibitive. It certainly is not efficient. On the other hand, disengaging from interagency collaboration efforts would have a profoundly negative impact on SOF ability to be successful with either the direct or indirect approach.

Consequently, finding a more efficient and reliable way to obtain interagency collaboration should be a priority. Many distinguished national security theoreticians and practitioners have gone on record supporting national security reform that would, among other things, provide higher levels of interagency collaboration on a routine basis.²⁶ Even without such general reform, Ambassador Edward Marks and I have argued elsewhere that Congress could collaborate with the President on specific executive branch authorities that would significantly improve our ability to field low cost interagency teams capable of higher levels of collaboration.²⁷ Absent such new authorities, I believe there is still evidence that interagency small groups can perform at higher levels in some circumstances. We need to research small group attributes and conditions that permit better interagency collaboration. Such work is

²⁶ Project on National Security Reform, Forging a New Shield. Arlington, VA: Center for the Study of the Presidency. December 2008. Available at: <http://www.pnsr.org/data/files/pnsr_forging_a_new_shield_report.pdf>.

²⁷ Christopher Lamb and Edward Marks, "Chief of Mission Authority as a Model for National Security Integration," Strategic Perspectives, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, December 2010.

currently underway at National Defense University with the help and assistance of USSOCOM.²⁸



Finally, given the challenges discussed above, USSOCOM should consider options for strengthening USSOCOM's learning capacity. Admiral McRaven reportedly has said he would like to make SOF the most educated force within the Department of Defense. This might seem like a major challenge given historic trends in SOF operational tempo that militate against extended learning opportunities. However, operational commitments have not prevented USSOCOM from taking advantage of an excellent graduate education program for SOF at the Naval Postgraduate School. Theses by SOF students there constitute some of the best professional literature on SOF. Admiral McRaven published his Naval Postgraduate School thesis on the theory of SOF direct action, and it is widely acknowledged to be a work of enduring value.

²⁸ To date the organizational performance team at the Center for Strategic Studies has produced three in-depth case studies on extraordinary interagency collaboration. A forthcoming book will compare and contrast these and additional case studies for insights on how to achieve higher levels of collaboration despite existing constraints in the current national security system.

Otherwise, good research on SOF is not abundant. The vast majority of literature on SOF is for general audiences and describes the operations SOF conduct (see chart above),²⁹ and often without the benefit of access to all relevant sources of information and insights. It succeeds mostly in revealing a surprising amount of detail on SOF tactics, techniques and procedures, but seldom illuminates major problems and opportunities in a dispassionate and analytic manner. Among the remaining literature that examines SOF, there are few studies that examine SOF from a strategic perspective, as students of SOF have often noted.

SOF cultural temperament may be a greater impediment to SOF learning. The secrecy surrounding special operations and the critical importance SOF place on operational security can engender an insular culture not readily amenable to empirical studies of SOF performance. In addition, SOF are culturally biased toward action, individually extremely intelligent as a general rule, and highly confident of their capabilities. In recent years SOF have proved adept at taking good ideas from diverse sources and solving problems creatively, but they are less inclined to encourage the kind of self-examination that is at the heart of all real learning.

Thus, USSOCOM may want to consider a small in-house USSOCOM capability to conduct independent research and analysis on topics of major importance for senior commanders. USSOCOM could call upon former SOF trained at the Naval Postgraduate School or other first rate institutions. An in-house capability with some longevity and Commander protection would be familiar enough with SOF to avoid elementary observations or inefficient start-up costs, but independent enough to give

²⁹ I am indebted to Shane Bilsborough for this chart and the research it represents. He used Google Scholar to survey the number of publications on special operations versus special operations forces.

USSOCOM leaders candid appraisals of SOF performance and opportunities for innovation. Industry and even other government organizations have made good use of such learning centers to improve performance and promote change. Such units typically require insider status and high-level protection or their activities can be suppressed by those responsible for immediate operations.

Conclusion

SOF are tremendous assets to the nation, well-recognized for their major role in safeguarding our collective security over the past decade. They deserve our profound gratitude, as do all our fellow citizens who have gone in harm's way to protect our country and our way of life. I appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts on how SOF can best meet the challenges of the future security environment, and again commend the subcommittee for investigating this topic.

Curriculum Vitae
Christopher Jon Lamb

Work Experience

Distinguished Research Fellow, Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS). Conducts research, produces scholarly publications and delivers presentations to the Joint Staff and Office of the Secretary of Defense and other informed audiences on national security policy, strategy and organization, and on U.S. defense strategy, requirements, plans and programs, and strategic military concepts. (2004 - Present)

Interim Director, INSS and Director, Center for Strategic Research. Served as the interim Director of INSS, guiding it through a period of reorganization at the request of the President of National Defense University. Upon completion of the reorganization, served as the director of one of INSS' research centers until a permanent follow-on candidate was identified. The Center for Strategic Research provides advice to the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and combatant commands, and conducts independent and leading-edge research and analysis in directed areas of strategic and regional importance. (Jan. 2010 – Jan. 2011)

Director, Research & Analysis, Project on National Security Reform (PNSR). Responsible for the Project's ground-breaking, 800 page, 2008 study on how to reform the national security system, "Forging a New Shield." Dr. Lamb managed the work of 10 groups with more than 300 national security professionals, each headed by a senior leader with experience in the national security system and/or organizational reform. Dr. Lamb worked with PNSR's Guiding Coalition, twenty five senior national security leader of four-star rank, including former national security advisors. (2006 - 2008)

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD), Resources and Plans. Responsible for Policy development of defense planning (including resource allocation for the defense program), contingency planning (including development of war plans), and transformation planning guidance. Also responsible for Policy oversight of requirements, acquisition, and resource allocation. From Sept. 2000 through May 2001 responsibilities included oversight of counterproliferation policy, including bilateral and multilateral discussions with allies and potential coalition partners. Acting DASD until confirmed in August 2002 (2000 – 2004).

Director of Requirements and Plans in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Responsible for policy oversight of Department of Defense planning processes used to define requirements for US forces, including development of defense planning scenarios. Executed contingency and war plans review on behalf of the Secretary of Defense. Responsible for defining and overseeing the DoD approach for achieving a transformation of US forces to meet 21st Century challenges. (1998 - 2001)

Deputy Director for Military Development, Interagency Task Force on Stabilization in the

Balkans. Responsible for developing and executing plans to provide for an adequate defense of the Bosnian Federation by training and equipping Bosnian Federation Armed Forces, and for administration of donated US equipment and international funds for that purpose. Administered a half billion-dollar program consisting of U.S. equipment, foreign donations and private sector training contractors. (1995-98)

Director, Policy Planning, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. Responsible for developing policy and requirements for Special Operations Forces, including an approximately \$3 billion budget, and for Department of Defense policy, roles and capabilities in low-intensity conflict. (1990-95)

Adjunct Professor, Georgetown University. National Security Studies Program. Teaching courses on low-intensity conflict. (1993 – 1997)

Foreign Service Officer, Department of State. Primary responsibility was political and economic analysis and reporting. Also managed consular anti-fraud and immigrant visa sections. Served in Haiti, Ivory Coast and Department of Defense. (1985-92)

Research Fellow and Acting Director, Political Committee, North Atlantic Assembly (Brussels). Managed day-to-day business of the political committee; produced reports on “NATO Manpower Issues” and “The Technology of Military Space Systems.” (1981-82)

Instructor, Ohio University. Taught courses on U.S. Foreign Policy and Introduction to International Relations. (1982)

Education

Doctorate of Philosophy, International Relations, Georgetown University. 1986

Masters of Arts, International Relations, Ohio University. 1980

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science and History, Pittsburg State University. 1978

Publications, Reports and Congressional Testimony

“Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference,” with Fletcher Schoen, Strategic Perspectives 11, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, June 2012.

“Expanding Chief of Mission Authority to Produce Unity of Effort,” with Edward Marks, Interagency Essay 11-02, Col. Arthur D. Simons Center for the Study of Interagency Cooperation, May 2011.

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Belief Systems and Decision Making in the *Mayaguez* Crisis: Gainesville, Florida: The University of Florida Press, 1989. Reviewed favorably in: Perspectives in Political Science (“Deserves to be included on the same shelf as Allison’s “essence of Decision” because of the rigor of analysis”); Choice (“a significant contribution to the literature on crisis behavior, decision-making models and US foreign policy”), and Political Science Quarterly (“an excellent case study...a rich source of both historical information and theoretical insights”).

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Online, May 5, 2009; at: <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=21422>

With Lukas Von Krshiwoblozki, "Public Diplomacy Conversations with a European," posted electronically, March 26, 2005, at: http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?Article_ID=11173

Honors

2010: Joint Distinguished Civilian Service Award, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
2003: Presidential Rank Award, Senior Executive Service
2002: Meritorious Civilian Service Award, Department of Defense
1999: Superior Honor Award, Department of State
1997: Meritorious Civilian Service Award, Department of Defense
1993 - 2005: Church Elder and Deacon
1992: Entered Senior Executive Service
1991: Meritorious Honor Award (Group), Department of State
1985: Gerald R. Ford Foundation Research Fellow
1984: National Strategy Information Fellow
1981-2: Research Fellow, North Atlantic Assembly
1980: Foreign Policy and National Defense Research Fellow, Congressional Research Service