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THESIS

**REEXAMINING GROUND SOF COMMAND AND
CONTROL: DOES ONE SIZE FIT ALL?**

by

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December 2016

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**REEXAMINING GROUND SOF COMMAND AND CONTROL: DOES ONE
SIZE FIT ALL?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

The current designs employed by the U.S. Department of Defense for the command and control of special operations forces (SOF) in limited contingency environments require reexamination to see whether they are sufficient or can be improved to meet the needs of the current operational environment. Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) and Special Operations Command-Forward (SOC-FWD) structures provide a scalable response to identified problems but still primarily operate as closed organizations in complex turbulent environments that would be better influenced by an open organizational design. This research examines how existing Marine Special Operations Forces, Army Special Operations Forces, and Naval Special Operations Forces organizations can meet the demands of complex operational environments at the task force level more efficiently. JSOTFs and SOC-FWDs provide adaptive organizations when employed with clear unity of effort and command within a Joint Task Force. Performance is increased when homogenous organizations command and control ground SOF during operations, vice using a Theater Special Operations Command, as doctrine prescribes.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFSOC	Air Force Special Operations Command
AOR	area of responsibility
AQ	al-Qaeda
ARSOF	Army Special Operations Forces
BN	battalion
C2	command and control
CDR	commander
CF	conventional forces
CFLCC	Combined Forces Landing Component Command
CFSOCC	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command
CJSOTF	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CONPLAN	Contingency Plan
CONUS	Continental United States
CT	counter terrorism
DOD	Department of Defense
GCC	Geographic Combatant Command
GPF	general purpose forces
GSN	Global Special Operations Forces Network
H-Hour	the specific hour an attack is to commence
HN	host nation
IGO	inter-governmental organization
JFC	Joint Force Commander
JFSOCC	Joint Forces Special Operations Component Commander
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
JSOFOR	Joint Special Operations Forces
JSOTF	Joint Special Operations Task Force
JTF	Joint Task Force
JTFSO	Joint Task Force South
KIA	killed in action

LTG	Lieutenant General (USA)
MARSOF	Marine Special Operations Forces
MG	Major General (USA)
MGen	Major General (USMC)
MNF	multi-national force
NAVSOF	Naval Special Operations Forces
NMF	National Mission Force
NSW	Naval Special Warfare
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OPCON	operational control
OPLAN	operation plan
OPORD	operations order
PDF	Panamanian Defense Force
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
SBU	Special Boat Unit
SEAL	Sea Air and Land Naval Special Operator
SF	Special Forces
SFG	Special Forces Group
SMU	Special Missions Unit
SOAR	Special Operations Aviation Regiment
SOCENT	Special Operations Command Central
SOC-FWD	Special Operations Command-Forward
SOC SOUTH	Special Operations Command South
SOF	special operations forces
SOJTF	Special Operations Joint Task Force
STS	Special Tactics Squadron
TACON	tactical control
TF	task force
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
UN	United Nations
UNSOM	United Nations Operations in Somalia
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command

USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
USFORSOM	United States Forces Somalia
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
USSOF	United States Special Operations Forces
USSOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Combined Joint Special Operations Task Forces (CJSOTFs) and Special Operations Command-Forwards (SOC-FWDs) for task force (TF) level command and control of special operations forces (SOF) have had varying degrees of success across a range of operations. The designs are meant to be flexible and adjusted to meet the needs of the operating environment, much like an open organization. This research examines three case studies including operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, and the initial invasion into Afghanistan during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to identify principles of effective command and control.

In all case studies, the HQ elements formed around existing homogenous commands and not a Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) staff with limited training and SOF representation. In Panama, the actual HQ element came from the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), in Somalia JSOC supported it as well, and 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) was the primary command and control (C2) organization in Afghanistan. In each of these cases, the minimum level of command capable of organizing all ground SOF forces was at the O-6 level (Colonel/Captain). In two of the cases, the commander was the rank of Major General. Having a leader that outranks the leaders of subordinate commands is critical in organizing the force along service lines as well as for external coordination with Joint Task Force (JTF) leaders and adjacent commands. As future battlefields become more distributed, and actual decision making occurs at a lower tactical level, overall operational planning and synchronization will still need to occur at the operational or strategic level with minimal interference between the two.

Ultimately, the existing SOF organizations for the C2 of ground forces function, but need to be adjusted to the needs of the operating environment to improve effectiveness. They are most effective when they effectively achieve unity of effort, a clear chain of command, flattened command structure and communications, and have clearly delineated and understood tasks. Homogenous units at the group and regimental levels or above should be capable of executing these responsibilities on a rotational basis

based on geographic region. The TSOCs are not ideal for these types of large-scale limited contingency operations. The TSOCs should be responsible for maintaining accurate intelligence and infrastructure in their respective areas of responsibility (AORs) to facilitate units designated to execute C2. If the current prescribed method of having TSOCs actually C2 operations persists, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) needs to effectively address the personnel and training shortfalls that currently exist within them.

Key principles derived from the case studies include the following:

1. When organizations incorporate sound fundamentals, such as full integration with conventional force (CF) planning and possessing unity of effort with a clear chain of command, they resemble adaptive organizations and their likelihood of success is increased dramatically. These principles were critical in the outcome of each case study.
2. Minimizing the chain of command flattens communications between ground elements and senior leaders and enables quick decision making and reduces ambiguity on the battlefield.
3. Regionally aligned forces have the potential to better facilitate the initiation of operations due to familiarity with the population and terrain. This supports a more efficient execution during the initial stages of an operation.
4. Having a leader that outranks the leaders of subordinate commands is critical in organizing the force along service lines as well as for external coordination with JTF leaders and adjacent commands.
5. Homogenous commands including Marine special operations forces (MARSOFF), Army special operations forces (ARSOFF), and Naval special operations forces (NAVSOFF) have the ability to be staffed and trained to provide a more effective response for command and control than a TSOC.

The actual success of a TF level command and control element is also affected by a number of additional factors that this research did not address, such as command climate, fiscal resources, and logistics support available, etc. This research is not meant to provide all-encompassing guidance to commanders, but rather is to be used as a tool that demonstrates how certain principles have had positive and negative effects in prior SOF operations and how they can influence future operations.

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I. IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

A. INTRODUCTION

The current organizational design for the command and control of ground special operations forces (SOF) in limited contingency environments may not be sufficient to meet the needs of the current operational environment. The commonly used centralized and decentralized command structures are the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) and the Special Operations Command Forward (SOC-FWD), respectively. They are used for a variety of mission sets and have been adopted as the standard for organizational design regardless of the mission requirements or operating environments. As the demand for the tactical utilization of ground SOF in limited contingencies grows, SOF command and control organizations should seek to operate with maximum efficiency while still maintaining the expertise required for successful execution. For these reasons, the current organizational design deserves re-examination to evaluate its functionality in anticipated operations.

Limited contingency operations lie in the middle of the range of a military operations continuum between major combat operations and security engagement and deterrence operations.¹ Doctrinally, these operations are defined as “small scale, limited-duration operations, such as *strikes*, *raids*, and *peace enforcement*, which might include combat depending on the circumstances. Commanders conduct these operations individually, in simultaneous or concurrent groupings, or in conjunction with a major operation or campaign.”²

These types of operations can easily encompass the range of SOF core activities prescribed in *JP 3-05 Special Operations* including:

- direct action
- special reconnaissance

¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations* (JP 3-0) (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), I-5.

² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, I-5.

- countering weapons of mass destruction
- counterterrorism
- unconventional warfare
- foreign internal defense
- security force assistance
- hostage rescue and recovery
- counterinsurgency
- foreign humanitarian assistance
- military information support operations
- civil affairs operations³

Each of these activities requires differing levels of coordination, support, and knowledge of the assigned operational area to be effectively executed.

If this is the case, then why are generic solutions applied to each of these problems?

JSOTFs utilized in limited contingency operations are primarily composite units, with their headquarters formed primarily from Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) staffs. These organizations are ad-hoc centralized command and control organizations that often lack sub-regional focus, cohesion, and responsiveness.

SOC-FWDs are built as a subordinate unit to the TSOC and are principally manned with TSOC personnel, but generally have a large number of augmented personnel from outside of the command. The SOC-FWDs are standing organizations that are more cohesive, regionally focused, and possess the potential for increased responsiveness to local problems. The usage of SOC-FWDs is inhibited due to manpower constraints within the TSOCs.

³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations* (JP 3-05) (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), I-3.

Neither of these organizational designs provides an optimal solution to support any single SOF core activity, let alone multiple core activities, in limited contingency operations. To achieve a more efficient balance between core activity command and control requirements for SOF and organizational design, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) should examine other options for command and control of ground SOF. These options could range from the traditional JSOTFs and SOC-FWDs, to regionally aligned command and control units, to command and controlled contingency units amongst others. Having a more flexible menu of organizational designs suited to support core SOF activities needed in limited contingencies enables USSOCOM to gain efficiencies within its limited force structure.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

What principles of command and control are essential for task force level SOF headquarters employment in limited contingency environments?

C. THESIS SCOPE

The scope of this thesis will be limited to exploring the command and control of non-tiered ground SOF units (MARSOC, USASOC, AFSOC, and NSW) and their application of core SOF activities in limited contingency environments. In limited contingency operations, except when existing operations plans (OPLANS) and operations orders (OPORDS) are utilized, SOF command and control organizations are established in response to an external event and are not pre-planned.

This thesis will not address ground SOF command and control in large-scale major operations and campaigns, counter weapons of mass destruction, and hostage rescue/recovery. In major operations and campaigns, it is normal for SOF integration to be formally established well prior to execution and is not done solely in response to a specific event. Countering weapons of mass destruction and hostage rescue are primarily executed by tiered SOF units (JSOC) that have specific command and control procedures established for execution of these missions and therefore are omitted.

D. METHODOLOGY

The effectiveness of a command and control organization is dependent on its ability to achieve its operational tasks through the execution of its assigned core activities. The successful execution of these tasks is further supported through the implementation of the joint functions. JP 3-0 describes the joint functions as “related capabilities and activities grouped together to help Joint Force Commanders (JFCs) integrate, synchronize, and direct joint operations.”⁴ The joint functions include the following:

- command and control
- intelligence
- fires
- movement and maneuver
- force protection and logistics

as prescribed in JP1-0.⁵ Effective implementation of the joint functions enables

- organizing of the force
- developing of operational areas and control measures
- establishing command relationships
- providing operational direction and guidance
- maintaining SOF planning and targeting processes.⁶

SOF has used different command and control models, both centralized and decentralized to achieve these effects.

Using case studies of ground SOF command and control units employed in limited contingency operations offers the opportunity to conduct detailed analysis that

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, III-I.

⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-0, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (JP 1-0) (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013)I-17-19.

⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-2-3.

identifies the strengths of each command structure, core-activity support requirements, and requirements to accomplish assigned tasks effectively.

Case studies covering varying methods of employment of special operations forces in limited contingencies will be utilized. The case studies focus on a variety of missions executed in multiple geographic areas. The variety of missions helps address the wide scope of how the Department of Defense (DOD) defines limited contingency operations. The planning timeline for limited contingency operations also ranges broadly and can be very rapid as is seen during crisis response operations or take many months or even longer for other contingencies. The cases under consideration are Operation JUST CAUSE (Panama), USSOF in Somalia (1992-1993), and the initiation of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM Afghanistan (OEF-A). These cases were chosen because they represent a variety of geographic regions, timelines for planning, and operational considerations on the ground. These cases are not all encompassing of SOF command and control, but cover a wide range of operations that apply to most forms of SOF employment in limited contingencies. In each of these cases, the circumstances surrounding the employment of SOF and the ability of the assigned headquarters element to achieve its operational requirements will be addressed.

By examining a variety of organizational designs using comparative assessments, a greater understanding of what is critical to the success of command and ground of ground SOF forces in limited contingency operations can be developed.

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II. ADAPTABLE ORGANIZATIONS AND CURRENT PRESCRIBED SOF COMMAND AND CONTROL ORGANIZATIONS FOR GROUND FORCES IN LIMITED CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS

A. ADAPTABLE ORGANIZATIONS

On April 24, 1980, eight servicemembers died and two aircraft were lost during the execution of operation EAGLE CLAW while attempting to rescue U.S. hostages held in Tehran, Iran. The mission was complex and had an unclear chain of command as well as forced participation of each of the armed services. The mission failed for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to lack of logistical redundancy, poor planning, and poor command and control. The failed mission was a low point for American special operations, but could have been one of the most revered special operations in history, had it had the proper planning and command and control (C2) in place to facilitate its success. The planners and the C2 element did not adapt to the complexities of the mission and its personnel did not work together fluidly.⁷

The current organizational design for the command and control of ground special operations forces (SOF) in limited contingency environments may not be sufficient to meet the needs of the current operations. The commonly used centralized and decentralized command structures are the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) and the Special Operations Command Forward (SOC-FWD), respectively. They are the standard for ground SOF C2 organizational design regardless of the mission requirements or operating environments. As the demand for the tactical utilization of ground SOF in limited contingencies grows, SOF command and control organizations should seek to operate with maximum efficiency while still maintaining the expertise required for successful execution. For these reasons, the current organizational design deserves reexamination to evaluate its functionality in anticipated operations.

⁷ Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The Iran Hostage Crisis: The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 431–468.

In business, if the changing needs of the consumer cannot be addressed the business is more likely to fail.⁸ If the business is able to adapt to the unique demands of the environment, the chance of success improves greatly. This approach, applied to SOF command and control organizations operating within the demands of ever-changing limited contingency environments, appears as a viable objective. Doctrinally, there is little guidance to assist commanders in understanding how to structure their command and control organizations to address their required core activities within the demands of the assigned operating environment.

In the business world, a static environment where profits and competition can be clearly predicted does not exist with the exception of monopolies and utility companies.⁹ The reality is that even with some level of predictability, within the environment there always remains some level of unpredictability. Civil engineer Gabriel Pall states that “as long as change is reasonably predictable, organizations can plan a variety of ways to deal with it. However, when change becomes unpredictable, unplanned, or unscheduled, planned responses are no longer meaningful in light of the rapidity of change. The only effective response strategy is that of continual adaptation.”¹⁰

Prior to the 1950s, business organizational design models focused on a centralized command structure that was very hierarchical in nature. These closed or highly centralized organizations focused on stability and relied on rules, regulations, and standard operating procedures as described by organizational theorists Henry Mintzberg¹¹ and Erik Jansen.¹² These organizations utilized specialized capabilities throughout the organization, coupled with formalized structure, but lacked in training.¹³ These organizational structures still exist, but are more “appropriate for firms employing

⁸ Gabriel A. Pall, *The Process-Centered Enterprise: The Power of Commitments* (Boca Raton, FL: St. Lucie Press, 2000), 15–21.

⁹ Pall, *The Process-Centered Enterprise*, 4.

¹⁰ Pall, *The Process-Centered Enterprise*, 4.

¹¹ Henry Mintzberg, *Mintzberg on Management* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1989), 11–31.

¹² Erik Jansen, “Mintzberg Configuration” (recorded lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, January 25, 2011), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/46146>.

¹³ Jansen, “Mintzberg Configuration.”

mass-production technologies”¹⁴ and are not well suited for the emerging technology market.

In the 1950s, organizational theorists identified that many businesses operating in highly structured closed systems were effective at mechanical production but struggled to meet changes required as new technologies emerged. This was primarily applicable to technologically driven industry that was constantly operating in turbulence.¹⁵ Theorists realized that “different types or species of organizations are needed in different types of environments.”¹⁶ This prompted the development of open or adaptive organizations. These organizations aimed at operating in a more decentralized manner in order to increase responsiveness to the demands of their operating environments. Today this is the norm for many businesses operating in a competitive global market.

By definition, limited contingency operations operate in this realm. These operations rest within the middle of the range of military operations continuum amongst major combat operations and security engagement and deterrence operations.¹⁷ Existing operations plans (OPLANS) and contingency plans (CONPLANS) address potential predicted actions by our enemies and our allies. These update as the priorities and security strategy of the United States evolves over time. Limited contingencies usually constitute unpredictable events that require a reactive response rather than proactive planning. Utilizing a limited playbook of options, SOF commanders often find themselves running a closed organization for operations that potentially require the flexibility of an adaptive organization. During operation EAGLE CLAW, this was the case. The solution developed was not specific to the problem and organized with a holistic understanding of the operating environment.

¹⁴ Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization (Updated Edition of the International Bestseller)* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 47.

¹⁵ Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 46–49.

¹⁶ Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 42.

¹⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, I-5.

B. CURRENTLY PRESCRIBED SOF COMMAND AND CONTROL ORGANIZATIONS FOR LIMITED CONTINGENCIES

U.S. joint forces define C2 as “the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission.”¹⁸ This definition supports other amplifying guidance including, “C2 functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel, equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordinating, and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission.”¹⁹ Essentially, command gives, among other things, legal authority to an individual commander to direct operations. Control is the means in how they effectively coordinates and execute these operations. The range of authorities varies greatly depending on the level of command with the ultimate military responsibility residing with the Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) Commander.²⁰ The GCC in-turn relies on their subordinate Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) Commander to supervise the utilization of SOF assigned to the area of operational responsibility (AOR). As contingencies develop, the TSOC Commander assigns personnel to establish command and control elements to support the GCC, normally in the form of a Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF). In accordance with JP 1-0,

the SOJTF is the principal joint SOF organization tasked to meet all special operations requirements in major operations, campaigns, or a contingency....A SOJTF is a modular, tailorable, and scalable SOF organization that allows United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to more efficiently provide integrated, fully capable, and enabled joint SOF to GCCs and subordinate Joint Force Commanders (JFCs) based on the strategic, operational, and tactical context.²¹

The SOJTF is generally responsible for administering all SOF requirements under the Joint Task Force (JTF), including aviation, ground, maritime, special missions units,

¹⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, GL-5.

¹⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, V-14.

²⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, GL-5.

²¹ Joint Chief of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-4.

and may even serve as the JTF Commander.²² The TSOC primarily sources these organizations, but USSOCOM can also directly source the personnel if the demand exceeds the TSOC's capacity.²³ Within a SOJTF or TSOC, the ground SOF components evolve into subordinate JSOTF's and SOC-FWDs. During limited contingency operations, the JSOTF and the SOC-FWD may be independent of a SOJTF and work directly for the TSOC. These designs focus on incorporating traditional military command and control capabilities. Both designs mimic conventional military staff structure and are the most frequently prescribed ground SOF command and control elements used in limited contingency operations.

The effectiveness of these command and control organizations is dependent on their ability to achieve operational and tactical tasks. Both organizations execute these tasks through the implementation of the joint functions. "Joint functions are related capabilities and activities grouped together to help JFCs integrate, synchronize, and direct joint operations."²⁴ The joint functions include command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, force protection, and sustainment (logistics). Joint doctrine further dictates that SOF command and control organizations effectively implement the joint functions to enable the organizing of the force, development of operational areas and control measures, establish command relationships, provide operational direction and guidance, and maintain SOF mission planning and targeting.²⁵ This guidance promotes a flexible and adaptive task organized command and control design, but often administered in a highly standardized structure as displayed in Figure 1

²² Joint Chief of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-4-5.

²³ Joint Chief of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-4-17.

²⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, III-I.

²⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-2-3.

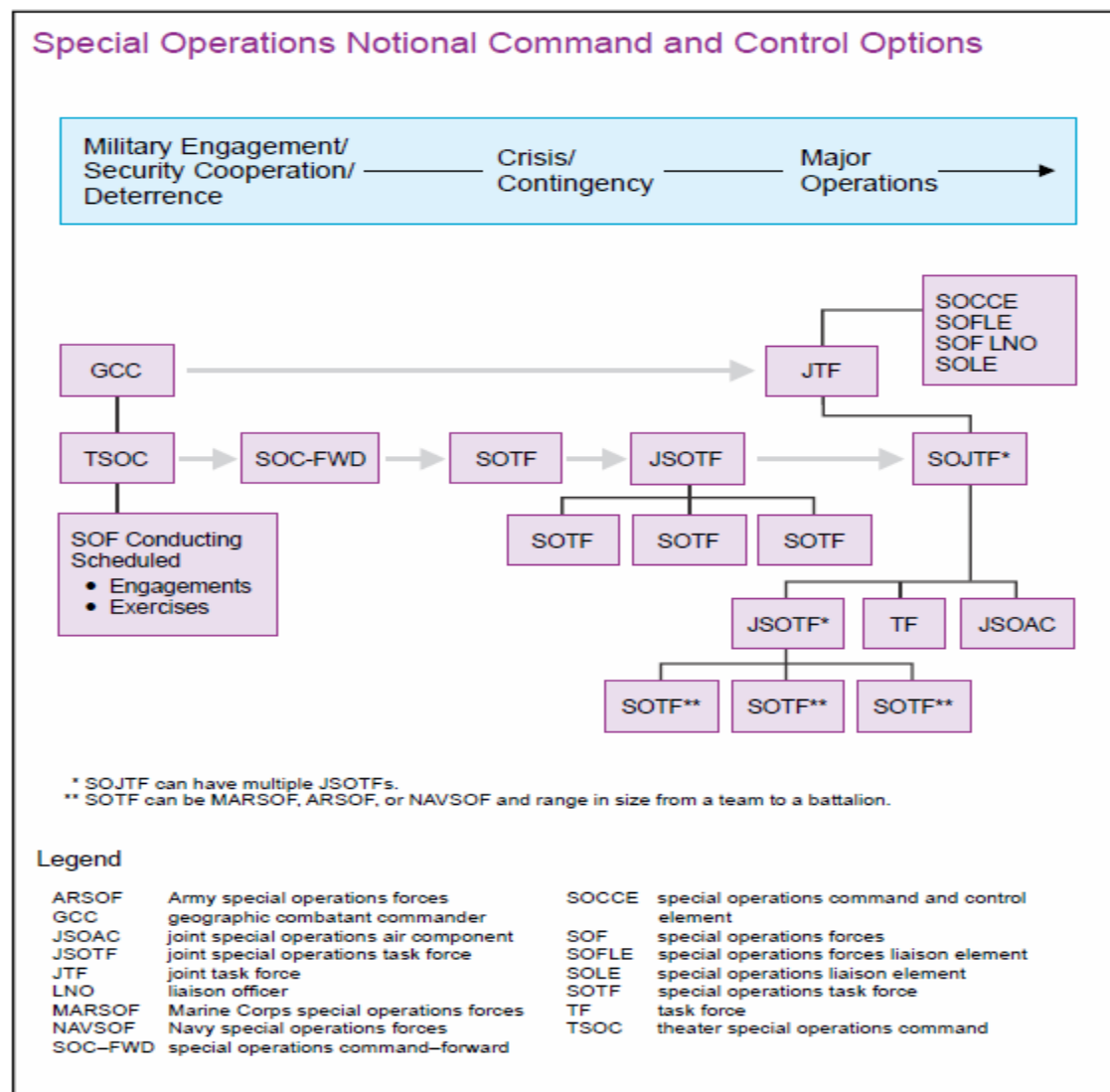


Figure 1. SOF C2 Node Options²⁶

An example of this structure's implementation is the ground SOF C2 structure used in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in the years following the initial invasion. Under the oversight of SOJTF-Afghanistan fell CJSOTF-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). CJSOTF-A presided over the day-to-day implementation of strategy and

²⁶ Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-13.

joint function support throughout the operation. CJSOTF-A further delegated C2 duties into regionally aligned SOTFs to provide even more localized support.²⁷

1. The Joint Special Operations Task Force

The centralized SOF ground command and control model comes in the form of a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) formed within a TSOC: “a JSOTF is generally composed of units of two or more SOF Service components formed to unilaterally carry out specific special operations or activities, or to support a JFC conducting joint operations.”²⁸ JSOTFs have been the primary method for the command and control of ground SOF units in limited contingencies. This structure replicates formal military structure with the primary variation in its employment coming from the number of personnel utilized. “A JSOTF staff is normally drawn from the TSOC staff and augmented by Service components or an existing O-6-level HQ from an existing SOF Service component with augmentation from other SOF or Conventional Force (CF).”²⁹ This is the most commonly applied manner in which ground SOF are commanded and controlled in limited contingency environments. This assignment of personnel requires rapid cohesion and understanding of procedures.

The initial establishment of a JSOTF staff presents significant organizational, planning, and training considerations. These considerations normally involve the ability to rapidly fuse a core SOF-staff with a diverse group of key CF augmentees, who may have varying degrees of understanding and experience in special operations, into a functioning staff for the JSOTF. Therefore, key SOF personnel assigned to a JSOTF staff, as well as those key personnel who coordinate with a JSOTF HQ, should understand JSOTF staff operating procedures, and special operations techniques and procedures in general, to enable timely establishment of the JSOTF, and initiation of planning and execution of special operations.³⁰

²⁷ Based on author’s personal experienced during multiple CJSOTF-A deployments during OEF. The author spent over 18 months deployed operating in SOF teams and SOF company billets within CJSOTF-A.

²⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-7.

²⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-7-8.

³⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-1.

The problem with primarily staffing a JSOTF with members from the TSOC staff is twofold. First, the TSOC is still responsible for executing routine functions as the regional SOF commander in addition to supporting the JSOTF.³¹ Outside of small-scale short duration requirements, the loss of key personnel throughout the TSOC results in decreased operational capacity and effectiveness. The second problem is that the staff of the JSOTF “should understand JSOTF staff operating procedures and special operations techniques in general.”³² The average TSOC staff is primarily composed of conventional force personnel with no SOF experience. SOF normally fill key leadership billets, but there is little depth in SOF experience beyond these personnel. This deficiency requires the TSOC to undergo increased training of personnel while maintaining current operational capacity to achieve a baseline proficiency to run a JSOTF. This is not ideal for an organization that has high turnover rates and has a majority of personnel that, at least initially, do not have the appropriate depth to effectively man a JSOTF.

Doctrinally, JSOTFs are supposed to be flexible organizations built according to the needs of the mission. The aforementioned struggles in staffing a JSOTF with TSOC personnel make this very difficult. A TSOC is inherently a stable, centralized organization that is reliant on standard operating procedures, rules, and regulations to function. Without this structure, the personnel within the TSOC would struggle to execute daily tasks due to their limited SOF capabilities and high turnover. In turn, when JSOTFs are established they normally replicate Figure 2. This design plays to the strengths of the staff that comes primarily from a conventional operational background as it mimics conventional command and control configurations. This structure is pre-determined based on internal deficiencies and does not address the requirements of the potential operating environment. The JSOTF is supposed to be scalable, but rarely deploys with anything below the standard configuration (Figure 2) unless there are external constraints emplaced on the TSOC/GCC Commander such as force caps.

³¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-2.

³² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-1.

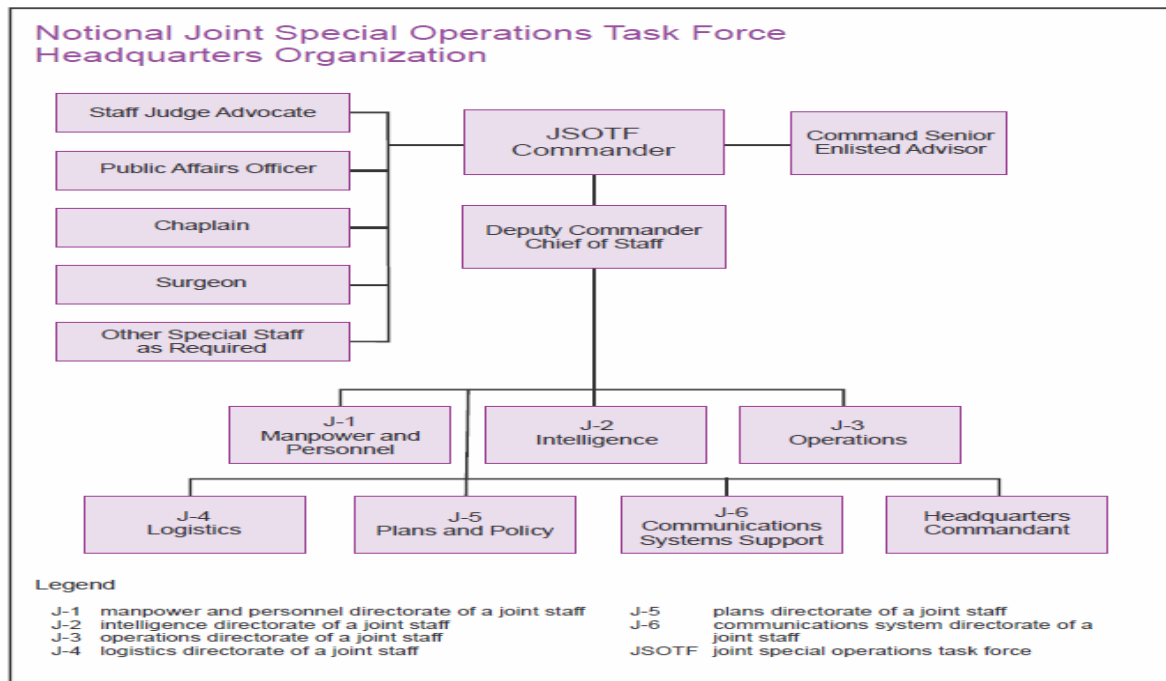


Figure 2. Notional Joint Special Operations Task Force Organization³³

An example of the CJSOTF concept gone awry is Task Force (TF) Ranger implemented during the execution of United Nations Somalia II (UNOSOM II). The U.S. military deployed a 440-man CJSOTF to support operations under the command of CENTCOM.³⁴ The CJSOTF did not fall under the control of UNOSOM forces or under U.S. Forces Somalia (USFORSOM). The name of the CJSOTF was TF Ranger and its C2 element was comprised of JSOC personnel who had little previous understanding of the operational area and, in this case, was not operationally synchronized with conventional force counterparts.³⁵ TF Ranger ended in failure after suffering over 18 dead servicemen and losing multiple helicopters in the battle of Mogadishu.

The use of a JSOTF during the initial entry into Afghanistan provided a much better result than its predecessor in Somalia. This is discussed in Chapter IV. Doctrine

³³ Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-5

³⁴ Walter S. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia, August 1992-March 1994* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 2005), 48.

³⁵ David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 134–142.

does provide an alternative option, the Special Operations Command–Forward (SOC-FWD).

2. Special Operations Command-Forward

The more decentralized variant of executing command and control of ground SOF forces is the Special Operations Command-Forward (SOC-FWD) concept. This organization is designed to be more adaptive to its surrounding environment but it still replicates the structure of the traditional military establishment and is limited in its actual flexibility.

A SOC-FWD is normally smaller than a TSOC, and a tailored, operational-level HQ that provides a forward-deployed, persistent presence, and C2 capability...The SOC-FWD develops a close working relationship with the associated country team, HN forces, and any MNFs or IGOs within the HN, and helps the CDRTSOC in the role of JFC/CDRJSOTF, and as the senior theater special operations advisor to the GCC.³⁶

The SOC-FWD concept was initially championed by former USSOCOM Commander Admiral William McRaven in 2011 as part of the development of the “Global SOF Network” (GSN). The GSN was an effort to develop a network that “consists of a globally networked force of Special Operations Forces (SOF), interagency allies and partners able to rapidly respond to, and persistently address, regional contingencies and threats to stability.”³⁷ The SOC-FWD concept has since been introduced formally into the most recent Special Operations Joint Publication JP 3–05 *Special Operations* in 2014 as a possible means to command and control SOF forces.³⁸ Each SOC-FWD is built differently, but the key difference between it and a traditional JSOTF is that it is a standing, forward-deployed organization focused on a particular region and not a short-term response to an incident that has already occurred.³⁹

³⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-5.

³⁷ Thomas S. Szayna and Welser IV, *Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network* (RAND report RR340), 1. Accessed April 11, 2016. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR340/RAND_RR340.pdf.

³⁸ Szayna and Welser, *Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network*, 1.

³⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-5.

The SOC-FWD concept breaks down large combatant command areas into sub-regions or even specific countries. Within this reduced geographic area of focus, a standing command coordinates all SOF activities in the area. This enables the organization to have a detailed understanding of the operational area and have a functioning staff in place if a limited contingency or crisis develops. Since they are already forward they may have the ability to identify that the conditions for conflict or crisis are developing and, in turn, utilize preventative measures to help pacify the area before the situation escalates.⁴⁰ This command staffed primarily from the TSOC, but resourced with augments from commands outside of the USSOCOM enterprise.⁴¹

The SOC-FWD concept, utilized in some historical hot spots such as Lebanon and Africa, often requires additional staffing that the TSOCs cannot provide. This creates a need for continuous augmentation to the SOC-FWD from external SOF and conventional force commands. With the persistent personnel shortfalls throughout the SOF community, it is impractical to establish numerous SOC-FWDs in their current design. Existing SOC-FWDs also face the manning deficiencies that affect a JSOTF. Since the TSOC is the primary force provider and there is a high rate of turnover due to numerous augmentees, similar centralized organizational design measures are required to function. This promotes the likelihood of the organization operating in a more centralized manner and not operating at its optimal capacity.

The benefit of regional specialization and enhanced coordination capabilities with adjacent and vertical organizations make this design more de-centralized in nature, but its personnel requirements remain a deficiency.

The invasion of Panama during operation JUST CAUSE provided a command structure for SOF that the SOC-FWD designs mimic. Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH) and 3rd Bn, 7th Special Forces Group (SFG), both located in Panama, contributed heavily to the initial planning of the operation and then augmented

⁴⁰ *Posture Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven, USN Commander, United States Special Operations Command before the 113th Congress House Armed Services Committee* (Washington, DC, 2013), 4.

⁴¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-12.

the JSOTF when it was established.⁴² The current SOC-FWDs support daily operations planning and coordination much in the same manner as SOCSOUTH did during JUST CAUSE and can integrate into a larger command structure if the requirement arises. The execution of JUST CAUSE was a successful example of SOF C2 and the forward deployed elements in SOCSOUTH and 3rd Bn, 7th SFG were critical in the planning process due to their knowledge of the operational area and understanding the political and social dynamics of the environment. This operation was unique in that there was an exceptionally detailed understanding of the battlefield during planning and execution.

C. ASSESSMENT/POTENTIAL OPTIONS

Both current designs operate as closed systems despite advertising themselves as flexible, adaptive organizations that focus on the environment, as is an open system. These designs mimic a conventional command structure in rank and responsibility instead of focusing solely on mission requirements to achieve joint function integration for mission accomplishment. Both the JSOTF and SOC-FWD attempt to replicate full-functionality maintained in rear area commands. Both models are scalable, but traditionally to stick to the conventional military hierarchical design.

Limited contingency operations should require an open organizational design approach to solve complex problems in an ever-changing environment. The organization tasked with providing command and control to ground SOF units needs to possess internal flexibility while still addressing the need of the hierarchical military establishment. At the same time, this organization needs to be as expeditionary as possible and reduce bureaucratic layers to increase the efficiency in decision-making. This will require a radical shift from the execution used in the employment of the current models.

Potential options in addition to the existing structures that exist within the current force structure may include the utilization of regionally aligned forces and the

⁴² Lawrence A. Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama : Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management, June 1987-December 1989* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2008), 43–50.

establishment of command and control contingency units. Both could utilize existing force structure to provide an enhanced response capability for limited contingency operations.

a. Regionally Aligned SOF

Within each TSOC, there exists a mixture of regionally aligned SOF that includes Marine Special Operations Forces, Army Special Operations Forces, and Naval Special Warfare commands that could form the core of a JSOTF or SOC-FWD like structure. These forces can theoretically be postured to perform the core command and control responsibilities required of a JSOTF or SOC-FWD with minor augmentation from the TSOCs or their parent commands. Since regionally aligned, forward deployed organizations already exist; they can provide many of the positive effects of a JSOTF and SOC-FWD with minimal impact on other TSOC/GCC operational responsibilities. Using a core force may enable the TSOC Commander to maintain OPCON of the operation in support of the GCC while providing increased responsiveness. The commander of this force would most likely need to be an O-6 or above from the TSOC to provide authorities, top-cover, and potentially serve as the Joint Forces SOF Component Commander (JFSOCC).⁴³ The operations cell and the remaining staff should be primarily reliant on the forward deployed regionally aligned commands.

Since these regionally aligned commands are provided to the TSOC on a rotating basis from the same parent units, a consistent task organization and level of capability is easily established. The TSOC will also know what deficiencies each unit has and what is required to augment the commands to achieve the appropriate effects. Utilizing these forward assets would enable the TSOC to maintain focus on the larger picture while allowing these regionally focused units to maintain a high degree of understanding of their assigned sub-regions and complement the TSOC as needed to command and control ground SOF forces. This has a similar benefit to a SOC-FWD in that the regionally

⁴³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, III-7-8.

aligned forces can also help to identify and remedy problems before they escalate into a limited contingency or crisis.⁴⁴

An additional benefit of using regionally aligned forces to establish the core of a ground SOF command and control organization would be the ability to achieve greater continuity within the force. Since these forces would be composed of O-4 level commands, they can be replaced with other O-4 commands from their organic battalions during long duration limited contingency operations. This would provide units with like capabilities, similar training, and increased understanding of the battlespace for an indefinite period.

b. Command and Control Contingency Units

Another option would be to assign command and control contingency battalions. Essentially, this would entail a rotational assignment of SOF battalion level headquarters to provide on-call command and control for limited contingency operations in each GCC. This is a radical departure for theater SOF, but has been employed in conventional forces in the past. This would reduce the strain on TSOC personnel, but would introduce a series of standing readiness requirements for battalions in the rotation. This model varies the most dramatically from the normally prescribed organizational design, but should be considered to test the validity of the current models. This method can be integrated in multiple formats in addition to the aforementioned description.

Both of these models would be reliant on the incorporation of remote support or reach back for assets such as intelligence, and logistics. This facilitates a reduction in the organization's personnel and equipment footprint and the forward logistics requirements. Being light and flexible increases the ability to adapt to the environment as well reduces the logistical footprint and increases responsiveness.

⁴⁴ Department of the Army, *Special Operations* (ADP 3-05) (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), II-12.

D. EVALUATING GROUND SOF COMMAND AND CONTROL ORGANIZATIONS

The effectiveness of a command and control organization is dependent on its ability to execute its core activities of “synchronizing and/or implementing joint force activities” while completing its operational and tactical tasks.⁴⁵ Operational tasks prescribed in *JP 1-0 Joint Command and Control* include:

- establishing support relationships and authorities among subordinate units
- giving direction to subordinate units required to complete missions assigned to the command
- identifying the chain of command
- organizing and employing subordinate forces as required to carry out assigned missions
- identifying and prioritizing the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) requirements for the command
- relieving from duty officers assigned to the command if deemed necessary
- establishing operational coordination requirements for subordinate commanders for routine events
- establishing areas of operational responsibility (AORs) among subordinate commanders to ensure adequate local defense subordinate commanders.

These activities are designed to ensure synchronization amongst subordinate elements.⁴⁶ Tactical tasks include “giving direction for military operations” and “controlling designated forces.”⁴⁷ These tasks are achieved through the implementation of the joint functions: “joint functions are related capabilities and activities grouped together to help JFCs integrate, synchronize, and direct joint operations.”⁴⁸ The joint functions include command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, force protection, and

⁴⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-0, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, V-14.

⁴⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-0, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, V 6-7.

⁴⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-0, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, V-7.

⁴⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, III-I.

sustainment (logistics).⁴⁹ Effective implementation of the joint functions enables the organizing of the force, developing of operational areas and control measures, establishment of command relationships, providing operational direction and guidance, and maintaining the SOF planning and targeting processes.⁵⁰ SOF has traditionally used JSOTFs and SOC-FWDs to achieve these effects. The question is not whether these organizations can complete the mission, but rather are they doing it effectively and efficiently.

Using case studies of ground SOF command and control units employed in a variety of missions will assist in highlighting both tangible and intangible aspects of C2 that contribute to success and failure. Each case study overviews the mission background, missions assigned to ground SOF, unit organization, and operational effectiveness.

E. FACTORS CONSIDERED IN EVALUATIONS

The dependent factors or outcomes to be evaluated are the tasks required of SOF command and control elements as directed in *JP 3-05, Special Operations*. These factors are organizing the force, considering operational areas and control measures, establishing command relationships, providing special operations operational direction and guidance, and maintaining the SOF planning and targeting processes.⁵¹

The independent factors evaluated include size of the force, proximity of command and control headquarters, forced joint SOF integration, time from establishment of the command and control organization to its employment, seniority of the force commander, and SOF experience of the force commander.

1. Defining the Factors

Dependent Factors- the definitions for the dependent factors are derived directly from *JP 3-05, Special Operations*.⁵²

⁴⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-0, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, I-17-19.

⁵⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-2-3.

⁵¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-2-3.

⁵² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-3.

- Organizing the force- “CDRJSOTF organizes forces over which he has OPCON. CDRJSOTF also organizes the JSOTF HQ to assist in the control of SOF, provide support to subordinate SOF units, and coordinate with other JTFs and components as required.”⁵³
- Considering operational areas and control measures- “SOF-CF integration requires a well-structured C2 architecture and coordination process between the CDRJSOTF, JFC, and among all their components.”⁵⁴
- Establishing command relationships- “The CDRJSOTF exercises OPCON through subordinate SOF Service/functional component commanders or subordinate CDRJSOTFs.”⁵⁵
- Providing special operations direction and guidance- “For planning and execution, the CDRJSOTF provides the commander’s intent, guidance, and objectives to JSOTF component commanders. For employment, the CDRJSOTF provides timely and concise missions or tasks to each component and subordinate commander.”⁵⁶
- Maintaining integrity and quality of SOF mission planning and targeting processes- “The establishing JFC and supporting components should understand SOF mission planning and targeting processes. The integrity and quality of the SOF mission planning and targeting processes rely on well-informed decisions by JFCs/CDRJSOTFs.”⁵⁷

2. **Additional Factors**

- Size of the force- This is being used to determine if the size of the staff has any implications on operational effectiveness.
- Proximity of command and control headquarters- Proximity is defined as the physical location of the headquarters commanding and controlling ground SOF operations.
- Forced joint SOF integration- Forced integration evaluates the composition of the force and its effects on outcomes
- Time from establishment of the command and control organization to its employment- This factor examines the length of time required from the identification of a limited contingency operation to the employment of the

⁵³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-3.

⁵⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-3.

⁵⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-3.

⁵⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-3.

⁵⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, A-3.

ground SOF command and control element. This time is calculated from the approval of an execution order to the actual deployment of forces.

- Seniority of the force commander- This factor examines the depth of experience required to effectively employ forces in limited contingency operations. The experience is evaluated on the rank of the commanding officer of the ground SOF component
- Commander's SOF Experience- This factor assesses the SOF experience of the commanding officer to determine its' influence on the successful outcome of the deployment of ground SOF forces

III. OPERATION JUST CAUSE

A. BACKGROUND

After the Spanish-American War, it became apparent to the United States that it required a faster means of moving vessels and cargo than the existing Cape Horn route.⁵⁸ The United States decided to coordinate a treaty with Colombia in its efforts to build a canal in Panama which was under Colombian control at that time.⁵⁹ When the Colombian Senate refused to approve the treaty, President Theodore Roosevelt “threw his support to the cause of Panamanian independence..”⁶⁰ This resulted in a popular revolt in Panama during November, 1903. President Roosevelt provided support to the rebels and the Panama secured its independence from Panama in days.⁶¹

The United States leveraged its support for the rebellion into the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty. This treaty provided the United States the rights to “build, use, and defend” a canal that bisected Panama.⁶² The canal was completed in 1914. Over time the U.S. presence drew the ire of many locals and eventually in the late 1970s they the U.S. agreed to remove its permanent military forces by the year 2000 and turn over the operation of the canal to Panama as long as the canal operations remained uninterrupted via the Panama Canal Treaty.⁶³ In 1981, the Panamanian leader who had signed the treaty, General Omar Torrijos, was killed in a plane crash created an unstable military dominated government. By 1983 General Manuel Noriega, formerly Torrijos’ top intelligence officer, took charge over the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF). Noriega’s involvement with numerous illicit activities made him difficult for the United States to work with though he worked closely with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). As the

⁵⁸ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama June 1987 – December 1989*, 2.

⁵⁹ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama June 1987 – December 1989*, 3.

⁶⁰ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama June 1987 – December 1989*, 3.

⁶¹ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama June 1987 – December 1989*, 3.

⁶² Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama June 1987 – December 1989*, 3.

⁶³ Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Just Cause : The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama, February 1988-January 1990* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 1995), 5.

United States increased its pressure for him to resign, the dictator became more unpredictable and the security of Panama began to deteriorate.⁶⁴

B. MISSION PLANNING

As the security situation continued to become degraded, the United States began planning for limited contingency operations to remove Noriega after diplomatic measures failed.⁶⁵ The initial plan, ELABORATE MAZE, was developed in 1988 and quickly evolved into OPLAN BLUE SPOON, the plan to remove Noriega. The planning process was benefited by the existing U.S. military infrastructure and staff in Panama as well the potential to consolidate command and control under the provisions of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.⁶⁶ Command and control (C2) of the entire operation was designated to United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) who in turn appointed Lieutenant General (LtGen) Carl Stiner as Commander of Joint Task Force-South (JTFSO). LtGen. Stiner's headquarters from the XVIII Airborne Corps would be responsible for the bulk of the planning and coordination for the operation. When USSOUTHCOM consolidated overall C2 of the entire operation under JTFSO it promoted ease of planning and coordination between all involved units.⁶⁷ As depicted in Figure 3, JTFSO was organized with an "emphasis on a majority of single service forces, while remaining a joint operation."⁶⁸ This structure ensured "every group from the platoon to the task force level worked for JTF South," including all SOF.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 6–7.

⁶⁵ Michael E. Seitz, "Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence (C3I) Factors," in, *Operation Just Cause: The U.S. Intervention in Panama*, ed. Bruce W. Watson and Peter Tsouras (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 105.

⁶⁶ Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 1.

⁶⁷ Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 17–18.

⁶⁸ Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 110.

⁶⁹ Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 107.

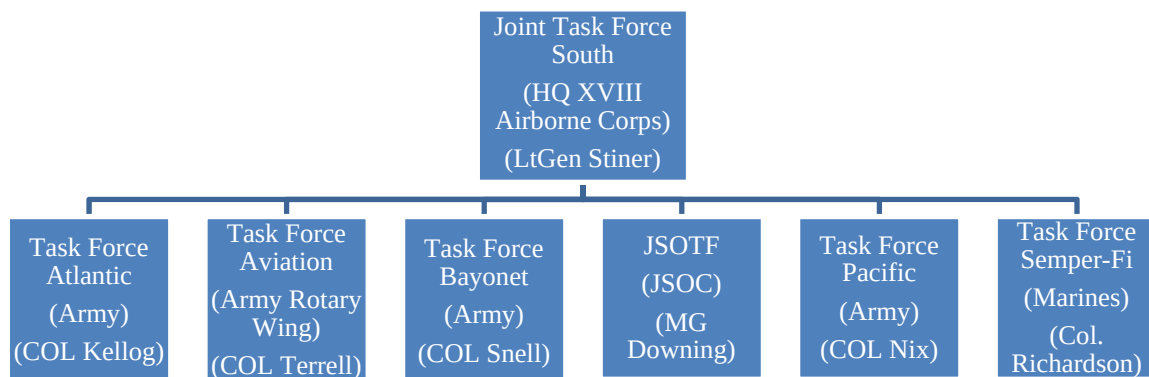


Figure 3. Operation JUST CAUSE Task Organization⁷⁰

During planning United States Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH) identified that it did not have the capacity to control all special operations units assigned for the operation. SOCSOUTH had limited personnel and still maintained other operational commitments throughout the region. They were however able to assist with the planning.⁷¹ Control of SOF for the mission was given to the Joint Special Operations Command led by Major General (MGen) Wayne Downing. The JSOTF, led by MGen Downing, “reported directly to Stiner throughout the operation” facilitating unity of command and effort throughout execution.⁷²

On December 15, 1989, the “Panamanian National Assembly passed a resolution that stated ‘owing to U.S. aggression’ a state of war existed with the United States.”⁷³ The next day three Marine officers were wounded by Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF) at a checkpoint. Marine 1st Lieutenant Robert Paz died of his wounds shortly thereafter. The following day, President George Bush approved the plan. This set the stage for the deployment of CONUS-based forces within 48 hours in order to execute H-Hour on the

⁷⁰ Adapted from Edward M. Flanagan, *Battle for Panama : Inside Operation Just Cause* (New York, NY: Brassey’s, 1993).

⁷¹ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama June 1987 – December 1989*, 43–47.

⁷² Donnelly, *Operation Just Cause*, 113.

⁷³ Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 27. (This followed a series of escalations by the Panamanian government in its harassment of U.S. personnel stationed in Panama)

night of 20th.⁷⁴ With the dissemination of the execution order BLUE SPOON was renamed JUST CAUSE.

C. TASK ORGANIZATION OF GROUND SOF

The JSOTF employed for JUST CAUSE consisted of approximately 4,150 personnel, a significant percentage of the total force deployed.⁷⁵ The task organization of ground SOF mirrored that of much of the conventional force structure in that each subordinate element was broken down by service (Figure 4). This facilitated identification of appropriate missions and improved unity of effort and command. JSOTF forces were also augmented with conventional assets that served in a supporting role and were very effective in use throughout the operation.⁷⁶

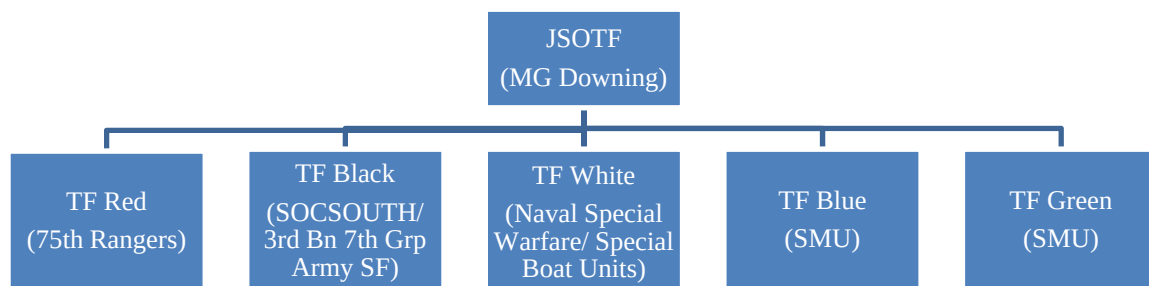


Figure 4. Joint Special Operations Task Force Organization Operation JUST CAUSE⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 27–35.

⁷⁵ Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, and Caleb Baker, *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 1991), 113.

⁷⁶ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Operation Just Cause Lessons Learned, CALL Bulletin* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Combined Arms Command, 1990), II-3.

⁷⁷ Adapted: from U.S. Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History* (US Special Operations Command, 2002); and Flanagan, *Battle for Panama*.

D. MISSIONS ASSIGNED TO SOF

During planning, SOF was assigned missions including surveillance, airfield disruption/seizure, securing vital communications facilities, halting Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) armored movements, hostage rescue, and capturing Manuel Noriega.⁷⁸ These missions were then assigned to the JSOTF's subordinate elements based on each unit's operational capabilities. The only true instance of potential forced jointness was the assignment of Task Force (TF) White (Naval Special Warfare) to gain control of Paitilla Airfield and destroy aircraft used for a potential escape by Noriega. During this operation the SEALs sustained four killed in action (KIA) and multiple wounded. The justification for assigning the mission to TF White was to ensure "that Navy special operators receive a significant mission during the invasion" despite having Army paratroopers and Rangers who were specifically prepared for this mission set.⁷⁹ Many of the assigned subordinate units had over two months to conduct coordination and training in support of their assigned missions. Several of the elements were able to actually conduct rehearsals on the actual objective areas prior to the operation.⁸⁰

E. OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF SOF

During the execution of JUST CAUSE, the JSOTF was effective in the execution of its assigned tasks with the exception of the SEALs at Paitilla Airfield. Despite effectively executing its assigned tasks, SOF had a disproportionate number of casualties in comparison to conventional forces. The JSOTF suffered 11 KIA and over 150 wounded in a force consisting of approximately 4,150 persons.⁸¹ The remaining 23,000 plus persons comprising the rest of the allocated U.S. forces in the operation had 12 KIA and over 150 wounded.⁸² These numbers do not reflect the fact that the JSOTF elements led the invasion and were often exposed to a much higher degree of risk than their

⁷⁸ Donnelly, *Operation Just Cause*, 113.

⁷⁹ Thomas K. Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 223.

⁸⁰ Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 106.

⁸¹ Donnelly, *Operation Just Cause*, 113.

⁸² Donnelly, *Operation Just Cause*, 113.

conventional counterparts who conducted relief in place operations after SOF elements had secured the initial objectives.

F. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Having forces familiar with the operational area was instrumental to mission planning. SOCSOUTH, however, was aware of its capabilities and limitations and pushed for a better equipped command to actually run the operation.
- Dividing the subordinate TFs along service lines improved coordination and communication.
- Planning for SOF operations was fully nested with CF planning and limited friction on the battlefield. Unity of effort and the chain of command (CoC) were clear from the onset of the operation.
- Executing conventional tasks in areas of high risk or where economy of force is required may be a mission assigned to SOF. SOF leaders must ensure that tasks assigned match unit capabilities. Fairness does not equal equality.

IV. SOF IN SOMALIA

A. BACKGROUND

In 1991, the government of Somalia collapsed when President Mohammed Siad Barre was ousted from power by a “coalition of opposing clans, known as the United Somalia Congress.”⁸³ The United Somalia Congress quickly fractured and the two main clans led by Ali Mahdi and Mohammed Farah Aidid became engulfed in a civil war.⁸⁴

During this period of civil strife widespread famine affected Somalia’s civilian population. Western leaders attempted to provide aid to the starving population, but the majority of the supplies were intercepted by the warlords.⁸⁵ In August of 1992, the United Nations (UN) intervened to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Somalia. This mission was called UNOSOM I (Operation Provide Relief). During the initial stage of the operation USSOF in the form of Army Special Forces from 2nd Bn/5th SFG played a minimal role by providing escort to the aircraft that departed from Kenya into Somalia to deliver food.⁸⁶ Despite the efforts undertaken in UNOSOM I, Somali warlords were still intercepting relief supplies.

As a result of the failed efforts of UNSOM I the United States initiated Operation RESTORE HOPE in December of 1992 with UN approval. RESTORE HOPE aimed to enable relief supply distribution to the population of Somalia by securing the main logistical arteries from attack by the warlords. Over 25,000 U.S. forces were employed in this effort including SOF. SEALs and SBU from the Marine Expeditionary Unit supported the initial amphibious landing by the Marines by conducting hydrographic reconnaissance.⁸⁷ SF moved from Kenya to Somalia and also deployed Forward

⁸³ “Operation Restore Hope, Battle of Mogadishu, 1993,” NOVA Online, accessed August 1, 2016, <http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/evans/his135/Events/Somalia93/somalia93.html>.

⁸⁴ “Operation Restore Hope, Battle of Mogadishu, 1993.”

⁸⁵ “Task Force Ranger 20th Anniversary: The Battle of Mogadishu, Oct. 3, 1993,” Defense Media Network, June 4, 2013, <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/task-force-ranger-20th-anniversary-the-battle-of-mogadishu-oct-3-1993/>.

⁸⁶ U.S. Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History*, 47.

⁸⁷ U.S. Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History*, 47.

Operating Base (FOB 52(-)) to provide command and control of all SOF operations as Joint Special Operations Forces-Somalia (JSOFOR-SOMALIA).⁸⁸ RESTORE HOPE was able to implement effective means of getting humanitarian aid to the local population and the U.S. requested to transition the mission over to UN control by the spring of 1993. JSOFOR-SOMALIA redeployed to the United States in April of 1993. When the UN took over, the mission the operation was renamed UNOSOM II in May of 1993.⁸⁹

UNOSOM II was commanded by Lieutenant General Cervik Bir from Turkey with MG Thomas Montgomery serving as his deputy. In addition to his role as the UNOSOM II Deputy Commander, MG Montgomery was the commander of United States Forces Somalia (USFORSOM) and maintained operational control (OPCON) of the UNOSOM logistics command and the only U.S. ground forces in the form of a QRF. Essentially, all UNOSOM decisions were driven by the U.S. as all other participants were reliant on the U.S. for logistics support. MG Montgomery reported directly to General Joseph Hoar, the USCENTCOM Commander and General Bir.

The objectives for UNOSOM II were “expanded to include: forcibly disarming the warring factions; political reconciliation; and nation building.”⁹⁰ The expanded mission requirements coincided with a massive drawdown of U.S. forces in Somalia. This resulted in a degraded operational capability coupled with a more intensive set of mission requirements. The mission began to degrade and attacks escalated on the UN forces.

The UN forces began to rely heavily on the limited U.S. forces and MG Montgomery insisted on the need for an increased armored U.S. presence, and SOF supported by AC-130s to target Aidid and his leaders. MG Montgomery’s requests were echoed by the UN representative in Somalia, Admiral Jonathan Howe. Howe also requested USSOF to assist in the capture and arrest of Aidid. This high risk mission was an addition to the existing UNOSOM missions already being supported by the U.S. MG

⁸⁸ U.S. Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History*, 48.

⁸⁹ U.S. Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History*, 48.

⁹⁰ John W. Warner, *Review of Circumstances Surrounding the Ranger Raid on October 3–4, 1993 in Mogadishu, Somalia* (U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, 1995), 4.

Montgomery's request for armored assets and AC-130s was denied in an effort to keep the footprint on the ground low but the use of USSOF was approved.⁹¹

On August 21, 1993, the deployment of a 440-man Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) to Somalia was approved by the Secretary of Defense Les Aspin.⁹² The JSOTF was Task Force (TF) Ranger and led by the Joint Special Operations Command Commander, MG William Garrison.

B. MISSION PLANNING

TF Ranger, led by MG William Garrison, reported directly to General Hoar at CENTCOM and only coordinated with other military and civilian forces as needed. Planning for operations focused on the capture of Aidid and were not formally coordinated with UNOSOM or USFORSOM (Figure 5). The TF Ranger elements were not regionally oriented or educated on the culture of their operating environment. All mission planning was tactically focused.

⁹¹ Warner, *Review of Circumstances Surrounding the Ranger Raid on October 3–4, 1993*, 4–6.

⁹² Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 48.

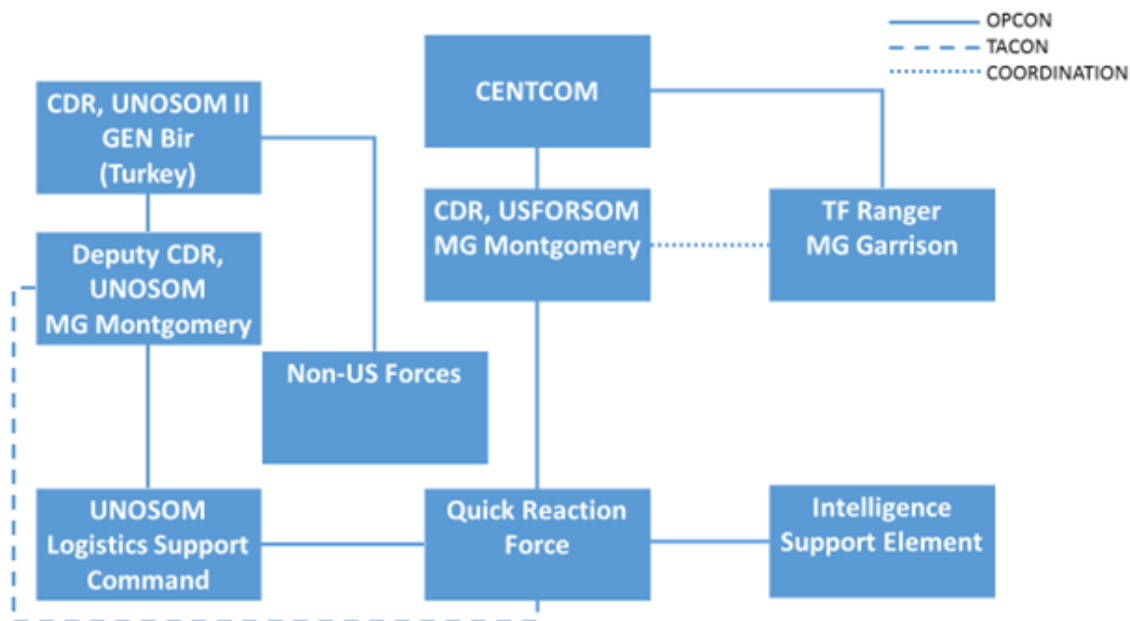


Figure 5. U.S. Forces Operation RESTORE HOPE Task Organization⁹³

C. TASK ORGANIZATION OF GROUND SOF

The JSOTF employed for RESTORE HOPE consisted of approximately 440 personnel comprised of personnel from Joint Special Operations Command HQ, 75th Ranger Regiment, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), 24th Air Force Special Tactics Squadron, and Special Missions Units (Figure 6).⁹⁴ TF Ranger reported directly with the USCENTCOM Commander General Hoar. TF Ranger had no reporting or coordinating requirements with any of the UNOSOM II forces or with USFORSOM. All coordination that occurred between these units was based on personally established relationships without any formal requirements. General Garrison also coordinated informally with the U.S. envoy to Somalia.

⁹³ Adapted from David Alberts and Richard Hayes, *Command Arrangements for Peace Operations*. (United States: NDU Press, 1995), accessed July 28, 2016, “Command Arrangements for Peace Operations,” accessed July 28, 2016, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/peace_alberts/recent.html.

⁹⁴ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 48.

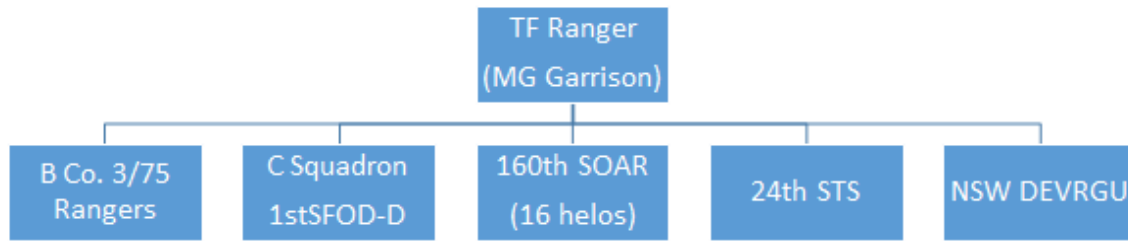


Figure 6. Task Force Ranger Task Organization⁹⁵

D. MISSIONS ASSIGNED TO SOF

TF Ranger was tasked with capturing General Aidid and his lieutenants. Once captured they were to be turned over to UNOSOM forces.⁹⁶ In order to achieve these tasks TF Ranger executed primarily special reconnaissance and direct action missions. The TF was successful in capturing a number of Aidid’s top lieutenants, but failed to complete its’ primary objective of capturing Aidid.

E. OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF SOF

TF Ranger executed six missions and aborted 35–40 missions during its deployment in support of Operation RESTORE HOPE. The aborted missions were due to a lack of intelligence reporting. Of the six missions executed three were night-time operations and the remaining three were executed in daylight.⁹⁷ During the execution of these missions many of General Aidid’s top lieutenants were captured, but the primary objective, Aidid himself, never was.

On the last major TF Ranger mission on October 3-4, 1993, two Black Hawk helicopters were shot down by Somalis, and 17 U.S. personnel were KIA while another 106 were wounded as a result of the crashes and ensuing combat.⁹⁸ This event is often referred to as “Black Hawk Down” after the title of the bestselling book by Mark

⁹⁵ Adapted from Defense Media Network, “Task Force Ranger 20th Anniversary.”

⁹⁶ U.S. Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History*, 49.

⁹⁷ Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 134–142.

⁹⁸ U.S. Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History*, 50–52.

Bowden. This major catastrophe “turned Congress decisively against staying in Somalia” and TF Ranger stood down shortly afterwards.⁹⁹

Overall, TF Ranger failed to achieve its objectives and its tactical failure during “Black Hawk Down” created negative strategic effects for the United States efforts in Somalia. TF Ranger also demonstrated that the use of National Mission Force (NMF) for C2 is not always the best option in highly complex operating environments.¹⁰⁰

F. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- SOF operations were not synchronized or clearly coordinated with CF. The lack of formal coordination had devastating negative effects on operations. Lack of local area knowledge coupled with limited intelligence proved catastrophic for TF Ranger. Working in a more coherent fashion with onsite CF may have increased situational awareness.
- There was no unity of effort amongst all forces involved nor a clear chain of command. Each element had different objectives and reported through different leadership channels.

⁹⁹ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 56–62.

¹⁰⁰ Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 138–139.

V. THE 2001 INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN

A. BACKGROUND

On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda operatives carried out attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia that caused 2,973 deaths.¹⁰¹ These attacks drew the United States into a global manhunt, searching for any persons who aided or abetted al-Qaeda in its efforts. This search quickly led to focus on Afghanistan where the Taliban government had provided safe harbor for al-Qaeda and its leaders. Within days of the attacks the United States along with a coalition of allies began preparations for deployment of combat forces to Afghanistan.

B. MISSION PLANNING

At the time of the attack the DOD did not have any ground invasion plans for Afghanistan or diplomatic arrangements in place for overflight, basing, or staging with any of the countries that lay adjacent to it.¹⁰² Quickly the DOD developed courses of action that ranged from cruise missile strikes, aerial bombardment, and a combination of the two with boots on the ground.¹⁰³ The President, George W. Bush, did not embrace any of the plans and was then briefed by the CIA that they had a network of sources and tribes that could be accessed with Afghanistan. With this knowledge the CIA quickly became the lead organization in planning for the initial invasion.

The initial plan called for an initial infiltration of CIA paramilitary elements followed by Special Forces Teams. The CIA would activate and coordinate support from their network of sources and tribes, and the Special Forces Teams would then work by with and through the new partner forces to attack the Taliban and al-Qaeda.¹⁰⁴ The details of this plan were initially developed by Special Operations Command Central

¹⁰¹ Leigh Neville, *Special Operations, Forces in Afghanistan* (Great Britain: Osprey Pub., 2008), 5.

¹⁰² Richard D. Camp, *Boots on the Ground: The Fight to Liberate Afghanistan from Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, 2001–2002* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2011), 92.

¹⁰³ Camp, *Boots on the Ground*, 93.

¹⁰⁴ Camp, *Boots on the Ground*, 93–99.

Command (SOCCENT) within the initial weeks of the attacks. The plans called for SOF elements working alongside the CIA to be split under two subordinate commands that divided the country into Northern and Southern regions (Figure 7). Traditional methods of targeting key infrastructure and leaders were limited due to the decentralized nature of the Taliban and caused the force to be primarily reliant on Afghan counterparts that were working with the CIA. This led to bottom up refinements in targeting as ground elements pushed forward.¹⁰⁵

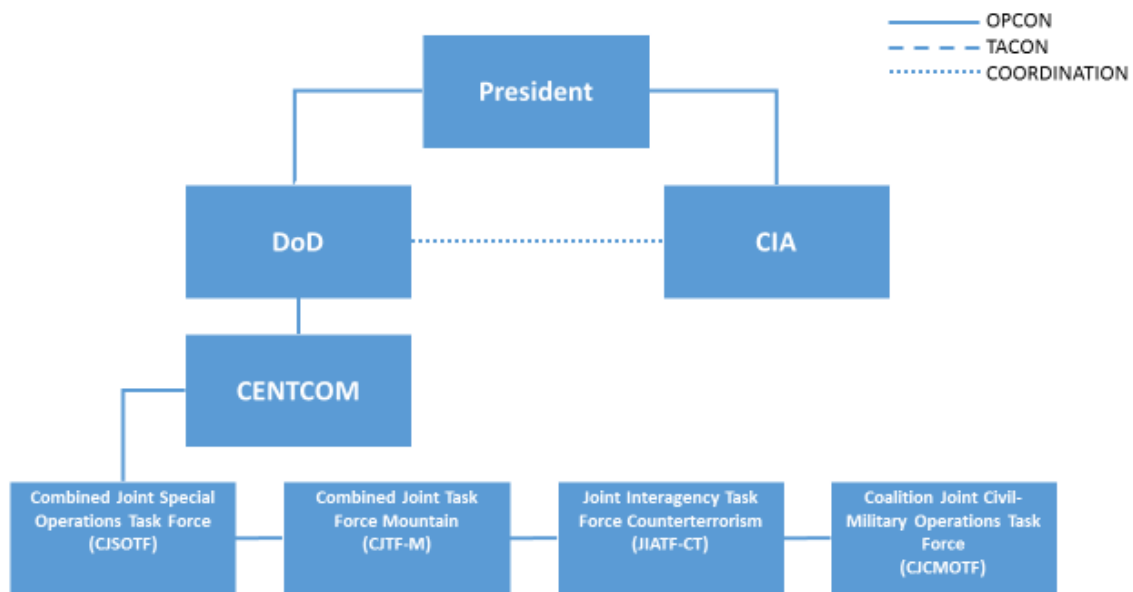


Figure 7. U.S. Forces Operation ENDURING FREEDOM¹⁰⁶

C. TASK ORGANIZATION OF GROUND SOF

Since the planning and execution cycle was compressed, a forward Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command (JFSOCC) was not initially established during the opening of of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Instead, SOCCENT designated 5th Special Forces Group and its commander Colonel John Mulholland as the primary coordinators for ground SOF operations in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁷ COL Mulholland assumed the

¹⁰⁵ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 48.

¹⁰⁶ Adapted from Neville, *Special Operations, Forces in Afghanistan*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Hy S. Rothstein, “A Tale of Two Wars: Why the U.S. Cannot Conduct Unconventional Warfare” (PhD diss., Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 2004), 189.

responsibilities of the JFSOCC for coordinating all SOF efforts in country as well as the duties of the Joint SOF Commander for all allies in addition to his main task as the commander of Joint Special Operations Task Force North (TF-Dagger).¹⁰⁸

The 5th Group staff was nearly overwhelmed by the excess of responsibilities bestowed upon it due to its small staff size and lack of dedicated planners. It did however provide direct access for COL Mulholland to the CENTCOM commander General Tommy Franks.¹⁰⁹

Afghanistan was then further broken down into Northern and Southern sectors and two separate SOF commands were established to control subordinate SOF elements in those respective areas. The third SOF Command TF 11(TF Dagger) was comprised of NMF assets and was focused on identifying high value CT targets throughout the country.¹¹⁰ TF-Dagger, led by COL Mulholland, worked in the northern portion of Afghanistan while Joint Special Operations task Force South (TF K-Bar), led by Navy SEAL Captain Robert Harward, owned the southern portion of the country (Figure 8). TF K-Bar also included numerous coalition SOF forces.¹¹¹

This command relationship caused confusion as JSOTF-N and JSOTF-S were OPCON to CFSOCC but also were TACON to SOCCENTs Combined Force Land Component Command (CFLCC).¹¹² TF K-Bar also had the additional responsibility of coordinating and mutually supporting TF 58 (U.S. Marine Corps).¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 67.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 67.

¹¹⁰ Neville, *Special Operations, Forces in Afghanistan*, 8–10.

¹¹¹ Neville, *Special Operations, Forces in Afghanistan*, 8.

¹¹² “Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC), Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT),” Global Security, accessed October 27, 2016, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/soccent-cfsocc.htm>.

¹¹³ “Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - South (CJSOTF-S) (Afghanistan) / ‘Task Force Ka-Bar,’” Global Security, accessed October 27, 2016, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/cjsotf-s-af.htm>.

By December 2001, SOCCENT established one primary headquarters element and three subordinate command and control forces. The overall ground USSOF HQ in theater was the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan.¹¹⁴



Figure 8. CJSOTF Task Organization¹¹⁵

D. MISSIONS ASSIGNED TO SOF

During the execution of Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan, missions assigned to SOF morphed over time as the organizations footprint and logistical support structure increased.

Initially, TF-Dagger was assigned the mission of coordinating and providing combat search and rescue (CSAR) for coalition aircrews.¹¹⁶ TF Dagger never executed this mission. TF Dagger then transitioned into an unconventional warfare (UW) role advising and assisting partner forces in the the removal of the Taliban government.¹¹⁷

TF K-Bar was assigned the task finding and removing any Taliban and Al Qaeda elements as well as eliminating their ability to conduct future operations. TF K-Bar also was tasked with providing support to TF 58.¹¹⁸ The predominance of their operations

¹¹⁴ Global Security, “Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC), Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT).”

¹¹⁵ Adapted from Neville, *Special Operations, Forces in Afghanistan*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 67.

¹¹⁷ “Joint Special Operations Task Force - North (JSOTF-N) / ‘Task Force Dagger,’” Global Security, accessed October 27, 2016, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/jsotf-n-af.htm>.

¹¹⁸ Global Security, “Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - South (CJSOTF-S) (Afghanistan) / ‘Task Force Ka-Bar.’”

were focused on reconnaissance and surveillance with the remainder on general combat operations.

E. OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF SOF

In both cases, the task forces executed a variety of operations but were used primarily in a conventional manner. In the North TF Dagger was heavily involved in the coordination of air strikes, but also participated in special reconnaissance and direct action. TF K-Bar also executed some SOF tasks such as special reconnaissance and direct action. Both forces were an economy of force option and produced results that normally require much larger units. Both units were successful in their operations as the Taliban was removed from power within months of the invasion and Al Qaeda was rooted out of Afghanistan. As the initial contingency operation morphed from with the influx of large ground troop formations, both TFs modified their roles.

F. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Unity of effort is more important than unity of command. Interagency cooperation was critical to the execution of the mission.
- DOD is not always postured to lead or coordinate mission execution. This also applies to general purpose forces (GPF) as SOF may be better equipped to lead an operation with GPF acting in a subordinate role.
- A flattened command structure leads to improved speed of execution and clarity in understanding the mission (Mulholland had direct access to Franks). TF K-Bar had a diluted CoC and struggled to understand who was calling the shots.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Global Security, “Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - South (CJSOTF-S) (Afghanistan) / “Task Force Ka-Bar.”

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VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

CJSOTF and SOC-FWD models used to fill the role of TF level command and control have had varying degrees of success across a range of operations. The designs are meant to be flexible and adjusted to meet the needs of the operating environment much like an open organization.

During Operation JUST CAUSE, the JSOTF acted in a manner similar to what is expected of a modern SOC-FWD as the planners and many of the executors had a high degree of understanding of the battlespace. The invasion of Panama also took advantage of regionally aligned forces when able, which further facilitated coordination and execution. SOCSOUTH was cognizant of its existing tasks and its limited ability to conduct C2 for a large operation and smartly petitioned to have a more functionally capable command take charge of SOF forces during the operation. This coupled with a moderately lengthy planning cycle, helped develop a sound operational plan. Overall, this operation serves as a good example of how ground SOF operations should be planned and coordinated.

During Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-A, many of the advantages afforded to the planners and executors of JUST CAUSE were not available. The plan did adhere to a simplified chain of command with flattened communications between ground elements and senior leaders that enabled quick decision making and reduced ambiguity on the battlefield. Unity of effort was also stressed and basic planning principles were adhered to and improved results on the ground. Effect efficient communication and maintaining basic SOF planning principles were critical to the initial success. Only after the command structure began to expand and more CF forces were added to the battlespace did the operational picture begin to muddy.

In Somalia, many of the planning and coordination tenets that made the operations in Panama and Afghanistan successful were not executed and failure ensued. Having multiple chains of command and no formal coordination responsibilities with CF was the beginning of a disaster in the making. This was further exacerbated by employing

TF Ranger in a mode similar to a on call contingency response force separate from ongoing operations and executing an independent targeting strategy. Before SOF arrived in Somalia mission creep was rampant and coordination with CF may not have prevented the botched operation in Mogadishu, but it could not have made the situation any worse. Unity of effort and command are key to mission success. When SOF forces are not fully coordinating with all battlefield partners, ambiguity and the likelihood of mission failure increases.

Using a regionally aligned force or a standing C2 contingency unit will likely have similar difficulties as a CJSOTF or SOC-FWD if the aforementioned points are not addressed. In all case studies the preponderance of forces comprising the HQ elements were formed around homogenous commands and not a TSOC staff with limited training and minimal SOF representation. In Panama, the actual HQ element came from JSOC, in Somalia JSOC supported it as well, and 5th SFG was the primary C2 organization in Afghanistan. In each of these cases the minimum level of command capable of organizing all ground SOF forces was at the O-6 level (Colonel/Captain). In two of the cases the commander was the rank of Major General. Having a leader that outranks the leaders of subordinate commands is critical in organizing the force along service lines as well as for external coordination with JTF leaders and adjacent commands. As future battlefields become more distributed, the actual decision making occurs at a lower tactical level, but overall operational planning and synchronization still need to occur at the operational or strategic level with minimal interference between the two.

Ultimately, the existing organizations for the C2 of SOF ground forces function, but need to be adjusted to the needs of the operating environment to improve effectiveness. They are most effective when they effectively achieve unity of effort, a clear chain of command, flattened command structure and communications, and have clearly delineated and understood tasks. Homogenous units at the group and regimental levels or above should be capable of executing these responsibilities on a rotational basis based on geographic region. The TSOCs are not ideal for these types of large-scale limited contingency operations. The TSOCs should be responsible for maintaining accurate intelligence and infrastructure in their respective AORs to facilitate units

designated to execute C2. If the current prescribed method of having TSOCs actually C2 operations persists, USSOCOM needs to effectively address the personnel and training shortfalls that currently exist within them.

Key principles derived from the case studies include:

1. When organizations incorporate sound fundamentals, such as full integration with conventional force (CF) planning and possessing unity of effort with a clear chain of command, they resemble adaptive organizations and their likelihood of success is increased dramatically. These principles were critical in the outcome of each case study.
2. Minimizing the chain of command flattens communications between ground elements and senior leaders and enables quick decision making and reduces ambiguity on the battlefield.
3. Regionally aligned forces have the potential to better facilitate the initiation of operations due to familiarity with the population and terrain. This supports more efficient execution during the initial stages of an operation.
4. Having a leader that outranks the leaders of subordinate commands is critical in organizing the force along service lines as well as for external coordination with JTF leaders and adjacent commands.
5. Homogenous commands including Marine special operations forces (MARSOFF), Army special operations forces (ARSOFF), and Naval special operations forces (NAVSOFF) have the ability to be staffed and trained to provide a more effective response for command and control than a TSOC on a continual basis.

The actual success of a TF level command and control element is also affected by a number of additional factors that this research did not address, such as command climate, fiscal resources, and logistics support available, etc. This research is not meant to provide all-encompassing guidance to commanders, but rather is to be used as a tool that demonstrates how certain principles have had positive and negative effects in prior SOF operations and how they can influence future operations.

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