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The SOF are generally considered as the instrument with operational and strategic effect. Being relevant in the future not only in context of NATO but also in context of each member state means being prepared for new challenges. The prediction of the future as well as the pressure of the evolution of conventional forces force the NATO SOF to review their purpose and tasks. NATO SOF proved in the past to be a valuable tool in the framework of NATO operations. Also some of the members deployed their SOF according to their national interests in the past. Unfortunately, due to the high demands for national budget the discussion still exists if the SOF are worth the cost and if the Conventional Forces can carry out the original SOF core tasks.

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Executive Summary

Title: NATO SOF in Future Conflicts

Author: Major Jan Kratochvil, Czech Republic

Thesis: The external and internal constraints could leave North Atlantic Treaty Organization Special Operations Forces (NATO SOF) unprepared to meet the nation's most important requirements.

Discussion: SOF are generally considered as the instrument with operational and strategic effect. Being relevant in the future not only in the context of NATO but also in the context of each member state means being prepared for new challenges. The prediction for the future of NATO analyses as well as the pressure of the evolution of Conventional Forces (CF) push NATO SOF to review their purpose and tasks. NATO SOF proved in the past to be a valuable tool in the framework of NATO operations as well as the national asset for achieving the national interests of each member state. Unfortunately, due to the high demands for then national budget the discussion still exists if the SOF are worth the cost and if CF can carry out the original SOF core tasks.

Conclusion: SOF units cannot be replaced by Conventional Forces (CF) due to the different nature and methods of work. Although CF can perform or take over some SOF tasks if there is a lot at stake, the best choice will remain SOF due to the selection of new staff, above-standard training, special equipment, and an unconventional approach to the task. However, if the main tasks of SOF are not revised to clearly distinguish them from the tasks of CF, these units may be gradually degraded in the future.

Preface

I decided to explore the future roles of NATO SOF topic because I have been part of NATO SOF almost my whole military career. Not so much information is available in Open Source Intelligence about the issue due to the character of SOF and Operational Security. The classification of documents connected to SOF represents the biggest issue in thoroughly exploring the papers dedicated to the topic. Also, the continuous effort to not break the classified line is one of the constraints on my writing. As sources I used my personal experiences, discussions with my colleagues, and a variety of literature concern to my topic. I desired to answer the question about the future role of NATO SOF.

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their support, time, and mentorship throughout this process:

My family: wife Michaela, Elen (8), Marketa (6), mother and father

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Contributors: LTC. Miroslav Hofirek (CZE SOF), SGM. Radek Vajdečka (CZE SOF)

Introduction

The world is constantly evolving, and so is the way of waging war. One of the main features of the current century is globalization. It affects trade, political relations between states, the exchange of information, knowledge, and, last but not least, the migration of people. Also armed clashes have happened since the beginning of the current century like the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Balkans, or civil wars in the Arab countries and Africa. The conflicts in the world have increased in frequency. For the purpose of preventing conflicts, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in the past. The official website of NATO states that: “NATO’s essential and enduring purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means.”¹ Thus, collective defence is at the heart of the Alliance and creates a spirit of solidarity and cohesion among its members.

SOF units are an integral part of NATO's defense. The coordination of NATO SOF is in responsibility of NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ). Linkeding describes NSHQ as follows: “NSHQ provides focused Special Operations advice to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and the NATO Chain of Command and provides on a collaborative, inter-dependent platform to enhance the Alliance SOF network. Through the NSHQ, NATO is transforming the current NATO SOF capability, i.e. leader education and development, doctrine, training and planning, information systems and infrastructure.”² NATO SOF have proven their worth on the battlefield, especially for their non-standard approaches to performing tasks. Just as the world around us is constantly evolving, and with it the threats facing humanity, so too are SOF undergoing a certain evolution. Additionally, due to the needs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Conventional Forces began to perform several Direct

¹ NATO, "NATO's Purpose", NATO, 2021, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_68144.htm.

² "NATO SOF Headquarters | LinkedIn", 2021, <https://be.linkedin.com/company/nato-sof-headquarters>.

Actions (DA) and Military Assistance (MA) type tasks, which belong according to NATO SOF doctrine to NATO SOF core tasks. The ability of CF to carry out some of the tasks naturally puts pressure on SOF units in the area of key tasks and their deconfliction with CF.

Several factors affect the development of SOF. The first aspect is a prediction of future threats and their impact on the state's defense system. The second aspect is about the needs of individual states for their defense strategy for achieving the national interests. In the case of NATO member states, there is another factor, namely the obligations arising from the membership. According to predictions of NATO analytics, it does not seem that conflicts will decrease in the future, but rather the opposite. NATO, like other nations, is reviewing its procedures for its purpose of collective defense in which NATO SOF will play their part. The external and internal constraints could leave NATO SOF unprepared to meet the nation's most important requirements.

NATO Special Operations Forces and Special Operations

Special Operations Forces (SOF) are specifically organized, well-trained, and equipped units that perform special operations (SO). As stated in the report *NATO SOF in the Modern Security Environment*: "Small in footprint and highly specialised, SOF can be seen as a precision instrument at the disposal of nation states seeking to perform a range of difficult tasks in an increasingly challenging operational environment and beyond."³ Although the main tasks of SOF often differ from country to country, they have several features in common: uniqueness, creativeness, adaptability, flexibility, and perseverance. SOF are the force multiplier, and the best result is achieved in the cooperation with other services. SOF are also well-known as innovators of tactical practices with the high sense for improvisation, and sometimes some of the

³ Madeleine Moon, *NATO Special Operations Forces in the Modern Security Environment*, 2018, 18.

practices become standard operating procedures of Conventional Forces. As David Tucker and Christopher Lamb report in their book *The United States Special Operations Forces*, “once these techniques become standard practice even in Conventional Forces, the opportunity for SOF to use them to help surprise and adversary will be diminished.”⁴ On the one hand, the standardization results in a loss of exclusivity; on the other hand, it has a positive effect on the development of conventional units.

Special Operations (SO) are characterized generally by conducting operations in enemy territory or in a politically sensitive environments, and as reported in *Joint Publication JP 3-05 Special Operations*: “SO require unique modes of employment, tactics, techniques, procedures, and equipment.”⁵ Some of the SO do not require extensive logistical support with an emphasis on maintaining a low footprint. SO can also achieve a strategic goal without the need to deploy Conventional Forces (CF). SO are also conduct in time-sensitivity constraints with high risk and sometimes conduct actions through indigenous forces.

The core tasks of NATO SOF are Military Assistance (MA), Special Reconnaissance (SR), and Direct Action (DA), and they are strictly set by the general agreement among each member state. Besides, each state determines and builds the additional necessary capabilities within its defense system for achieving national interests. Unlike NATO's main tasks, national responsibilities are usually subject to a certain level of security classification and may include tasks such as sabotage, subversion, unconventional warfare, close protection, or hostage rescue.

Military Assistance (MA) is characterized in *NATO SOF Doctrine AJP-3.5* as, “a broad category of measures and activities conducted by SOF that support, enable, and influence critical

⁴ Christopher Lamb and David Tucker, *United States Special Operations Forces*, e.g., 2nd (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 255.

⁵ United States Government US Army, *Joint Publication JP 3-05 Special Operations*, 18 April 2011 (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), I-1.

friendly assets through training, advising, mentoring, partnering, or the conduct of combined and other operations.”⁶ Besides that, MA is also a useful tool for collecting intelligence. NATO SOF MA - related tasks are carried out, for example, in the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, where NATO SOF act as advisers to the Afghan Special Security Forces.

Special Reconnaissance (SR) tasks are essentially defined in *NATO SOF Doctrine AJP 3.5* as: “Activities conducted as a SO in, but not limited to, hostile, denied, or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance.”⁷ Specific tasks are subject to Operational Security (OPSEC) due to the protection of know-how and political sensitivity.

Direct Action (DA) is defined in *NATO SOF Doctrine AJP 3.5* as, “a short-duration strike or other small scale offensive action by SOF to seize, destroy, capture, recover, or inflict damage to achieve specific, well-defined and often time-sensitive results.”⁸ Like Special Reconnaissance, Direct Action-type mission are connected to OPSEC, and it is usually impossible to find any relevant records in Open Source Intelligence. Leigh Neville states in his book *SOF in the War on Terror*: “Coalition Forces conducted kill or capture missions at the behest of JSOC and ISAF.”⁹ Despite above claim, it is important to mention that the main role of NATO SOF in the conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq is the MA, which is also conducted by CF. It would be better if NATO SOF focus on SR and DA because it would prevent the need for distinguishing between SOF and CF due to higher demands on the task and the ability to apply creativity, adaptability, and other important features of members of SOF.

⁶ NATO, AJP-3-5, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*, 7.

⁷ NATO, AJP-3-5, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*, 8.

⁸ NATO, AJP-3-5, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*, 9.

⁹ Leigh Neville, *Special Forces in the War on Terror* (Oxford ; New York: Osprey Publishing, 2015), 239.

Last but not least, it is good to mention the reasons why SOF are important and what is their main advantage over Conventional Forces (CF). Mark Moyar states in his book *Opposing Any Foe* that: “SOF were destined to clash with CF from the moment they lured conventional troops with promises of service in an elite unit, which is to say from the very beginning. Selective recruitment, specialized training, and self-designation as elite forces encouraged special operators to view themselves as superior beings, which inevitably antagonized the CF.”¹⁰ NATO SOF are characterized by *NATO SOF Doctrine AJP-3-5* as follows: “Strategic assets to be used to achieve strategic and specified objectives at the operational level.”¹¹ SOF provide the flexible, adaptable tool with a high level of readiness, which has the potential to fulfill set tasks with a strategic or operational impact. The Field Manual *FM 1-02.1 Operational Terms* characterizes Conventional Forces (CF) as: “Those forces capable of conducting operations using nonnuclear weapons and those forces other than designated special operations forces.”¹² Unlike CF, SOF has selected personnel, special equipment, above-standard training with non-standard methods, and a specific organizational structure. Attributes like that increase the likelihood of completing assigned tasks that are important and do not have much room for failure or are too complex for CF. SOF are also able to solve complex problems in a given territory because of their overall training comprising MA, SR, and DA. Therefore, SOF can prepare the ground itself for follow-on CF, especially in the initial stages of the conflict with emphasis on the setting of the system of operation and in terms of connection to the local entity. Unlike SOF, the preparation of Conventional Forces for the same type of missions will take more time than SOF because CF train for other activities.

¹⁰ Mark Moyar, *Oppose Any Foe: The Rise of America’s Special Operations Forces*, e.g., 1st (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 339.

¹¹ NATO, AJP-3-5, Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations, 1.

¹² United States Government US Army, *Field Manual FM 1-02.1 Operational Terms*, November 2019, 1-23.

Theory of SOF

The purpose of SOF theory is basically to provide an explanation of SOF's role, which also helps for understanding to others. There are several authors who deal with Special Forces (SF) theories, including Navy Admiral (retired) William McRaven, Dr. Robert G. Spulak, Dr. Harry R. Yarger, Dr. Richard Rubright, and Tom Searle Ph.D. The theory is important especially for trying to define the basic ideas, roles, and characteristics of SOF and Special Operations (SO) concerning future developments. Admiral (retired) McRaven wrote *Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare*. McRaven concluded his work at the determination of six principles of SO: “SOF are able to achieve relative superiority over the enemy if they prepare a simple plan, which is carefully concealed, repeatedly and realistically rehearsed, and executed with surprise, speed, and purpose.”¹³ Despite the fact that Admiral McRaven connects his theory to Direct Action, it must be pointed out that success in Direct Action lies on specific sets of conditions, which are currently not realistic in Conventional Forces. They allow creativity in planning to use non-standard approaches to the problem to attain a moment of surprise, and proper training facilities to achieve maximum speed. Dr. Robert G. Spulak wrote *Theory of Special Operations*. In his publication, he presents the following Special Operations (SO) theory: “SO are missions to accomplish strategic objectives where the use of Conventional Forces (CF) would create unacceptable risks due to Clausewitzian friction. Overcoming these risks requires SF that directly address the ultimate sources of friction through qualities that are the result of the distribution of the attributes of SF personnel.”¹⁴ This theory is based on a comparison of the

¹³ William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Novato CA: Presidio Press, 1996, 381.

¹⁴ Robert Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF*, October 2007, 16.

advantages, disadvantages, and characteristics of CF and SOF and also points out the SOF flexibility and adaptability.

Harry R. Yarger, in his *21st Century SOF: Toward and American Theory of Special Operations*, concludes McRaven and Spulak's theories to lay the common ground for SO theory. In his publication, Yarger presents twenty six proposals for SOF and SO: "The purpose of the premises, and the theory more generally, is to help understand what might be needed to be considered regarding American SO and SOF achieving success."¹⁵ Based on these premises everybody can broaden their knowledge about SOF. The author also highlights how the SOF use personnel and promote their skills for mission success. SOF assigns positions based on the individuals' strengths.

Dr. Richard Rubright wrote *Unified Theory for Special Operations*. Rubright strove to present a theory that is, "holistic in nature, timeless, focused solely upon special operations, and serves as an umbrella framework for other theories about SO a SF."¹⁶ The key thing the author states is: "SO are extraordinary operations to achieve a specific result."¹⁷ The value of the narrated theory for the reader is the presentation of SOF as a force that has the ability to react to something unusual or non-standard, which goes hand in hand with the prediction about appearance of future threats.

The last author is Tom Searle Ph.D, who in the book *Outside the Box: A New General Theory of Special Operations* deals with determining what SO are. The author describes the theory as follows: "The set of all operations represents an imaginary circle. There is a rectangle

¹⁵ Dr Harry R. Yarger, *21st Century SOF: Toward an American Theory of Special Operations* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 48.

¹⁶ Richard W. Rubright, Ph.D., Joint Special Operations University Press, *A Unified Theory for Special Operations: Volume One of a Three-Part Theory Series*, 15.

¹⁷ Richard W. Rubright, Ph.D., *A Unified Theory for Special Operations: Volume One of a Three-Part Theory Series*, 55.

in the circle that represents Conventional Operations, on which the state concentrates its financial resources and efforts. What is beyond the borders are Special Operations, i.e. operations that can effectively face unexpected, exceptional, non-standard threats.”¹⁸ The Out of the Box theory probably best corresponds to the future trend of using SOF. SOF should therefore continue to focus on building small teams, able to respond flexibly to situations in different types of environments, with full or limited support, and with or without the latest equipment. SOF units must be able to perform tasks both in armed clashes and in the field of diplomacy in the form of Military Assistance. It follows that SOF should focus in the future on tasks that go beyond Conventional Operations.

The theories of SOF serve to understand their basic principles. Currently, no comprehensive SOF theory exists on which the entire SOF community agrees. However, from comparing the available theories, it is clear how broad SOF's role is. Unfortunately, due to the unknown, it is difficult to determine specific theories, but at least the existing theories provide context for future roles of SOF.

Future Security Challenges for NATO

The exact form of the future battlefield is not known, and it can be only estimated due to the lack of objective evidence. The security experts agree on several features that will significantly affect the future environment. These aspects include the consequences of continuing globalization, the development of new technologies, and changes in the natural environment. In the *Strategic Foresight Analysis* (SFA), NATO analysts defined the following characteristics of the future environment: “complexity, uncertainty, globalization, confluence and

¹⁸ Thomas R Searle, *Outside the Box: A New General Theory of Special Operations*, Joint Special Operations University (U.S.), JSOU Press, 2017, <http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo83095>.

interconnectedness, disruptive change and strategic shocks.”¹⁹ The combination of the number of stakeholders, the interconnectedness of the world, and the speed of development of change gives an inexhaustible number of combinations. Robert H. Latiff, retired U. S. Air Force Major General and author of *Future War*, mentions that: “We can expect the future battlefield to be full of surprises.”²⁰ Dealing with the unknown requires SOF to adapt to rapid and sudden changes and react in a short period of time. The information interconnectedness of the world will continue to increase along with the speed of data sharing over time around the world. Thus, the reaction time will decrease for the outbreak of a conflict. The moment of surprise will depend on operations security procedures. Last but not least, the information domain will play a vital role, which, due to the sharing of often distorted messages, effectively influences social events. All further emphasizes the importance of well-educated personnel who will have to orient themselves in a short time and, based on the analysis, make a quick and accurate decision.

Another critical aspect which will impact the development of the future environment is the evolution of new technologies. The exact technologies that humanity will have at its disposal are not known, but current inventions and advances in science and technology at least give a glimpse into the future. In the book *The United States Special Operations Forces*, David Tucker and Christopher Lamb report on future developments: “Technology and associated breakthroughs in advanced materials, robotics, artificial intelligence, additive manufacturing, etc., are fundamentally altering social, economic, political, and military relationships, just as the agrarian and industrial revolutions did in previous ages.”²¹ Mastering these technologies will give an advantage to possible owner.

¹⁹ "Signal: Latest NATO 2017 Strategic Foresight Analysis Report", The Red Team Analysis Society, 2017, <https://www.redanalysis.org/2017/11/29/signal-latest-nato-2017-strategic-foresight-analysis-report/>.

²⁰ Robert H. Latiff, *Future War: Preparing for the New Global Battlefield* (New York: Knopf, 2017), 63.

²¹ Lamb and Tucker, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 245.

The combat will increasingly occur in urban environments. The predictions show, as stated in *NATO SFA*, “The power vacuum created by weak and failing states provides a breeding ground for many extremist groups, as well as a large volume of involuntary migration.”²² Thus, the poor security situation and poverty in third world countries will result in a huge wave of migration. People are moving to cities and looking for a source of livelihood. As a result, the new set-up will increase crime and strengthen gangs. The gangs will take the advantage of the bad life situation of those migrants and misuse them for their objectives. Another phenomenon that the world will face is the phenomenon of Black Swans. A Black Swan is generally defined as an important, unexpected event that has an impact on society as a whole. The 9/11 terrorist attack was an example of this action.

Analysts predict the occurrence of large-scale armed conflicts related to strong competition for power. The possible goals could be to gain geopolitical advantage and access to resources. Such conflicts can start as hybrid warfare and end in a nuclear war with following implications for the speed of identification, confirmation, and elimination of the threat. At the same time, these types of conflicts will expose the need for adequate protection of the population.

The future will also probably witness increasing conflicts among states, non-state actors, and powerful individuals. Adversary groups will use the proxy, hybrid, or irregular war to reach their objectives and will try to gain power over the population by bribing, inciting riots, and attacking the state's critical infrastructure to highlight the state's inability to protect its population. Identifying the enemy will become a more complicated process, and civil war and the destruction of the state as a whole can be the possible result.

²² "Signal", 41.

The exact nature of future threats is unknown. It can only be estimated. In any case, NATO has created a new *NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept*. A group of analysts state in *Key Insights from the Global Expert Symposium Summer 2020* that: “It is better to speak of a set of guiding principles which can be flexibly applied to deal with specific challenges.”²³ In doing so, the possible solution for solving future unpredictable developments lies in promoting maximum flexibility. Overall, in the report NATO WCC are three takeaways about preparing the forces for future conflicts: “1) cognitive superiority, 2) full-spectrum engagement, and 3) agile ways of adaptation.”²⁴ These are therefore recommendations from NATO analysts to build capabilities to deal with future threats.

NATO SOF and Future Security Challenges

NATO's main task is collective defense. Although the best defense is an attack as stated by George Washington, NATO is more in a position to respond to the attack. Thus the priority of NATO lies in prevention of conflicts. In NATO SOF doctrine, terms such as highly trained operators, adaptability, improvisation, innovation, and self-reliance are mentioned, which go hand in hand with the requirements for future operational capabilities. SOF seem to be ready for the future mainly due to their nature. In the report *Beyond the Ramparts*, the authors Jim Thomas and Chris Dougherty highlight one imperative about SOF: “SOF cannot simply maintain the status quo. They must constantly adapt and redefine themselves, while maintaining the core human characteristics that make them “special.”²⁵ SOF are constantly undergoing certain developments to be as effective as possible in their work. Therefore, SOF are also considered

²³ "NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept: Key Insights from the Global Expert Symposium | HCSS", 2021, 4, <https://hcss.nl/report/nato-warfighting-capstone-concept>.

²⁴ "NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept: Key Insights from the Global Expert Symposium | HCSS".

²⁵ Jim Thomas, „Beyond the Ramparts: The Future of U. S. Special Operations Forces", CSBA, 2021, <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/beyond-the-ramparts-the-future-of-u-s-special-operations-forces>.

pioneers in certain areas such as tactical procedures and the invention of new equipment. Also, SOF has typically selected and trained personnel who are able to operate in high-risk, time-sensitive, constantly changing environments. Nevertheless, SOF should look for ways to increase their effectiveness and future application. SOF as well as Conventional Forces (CF) must be ready to find those types of threats. Below are the recommendations for NATO SOF to stay relevant in future conflict. The recommendations can be overall divided into two areas.

Area number one deals with core tasks of NATO SOF.

Military Assistance (MA) carried out by NATO SOF should focus in particular on the roles of an integrator on the battlefield and the concept of the so-called Warrior Diplomat. Integrator on the battlefield means the ability to be deployed in foreign territory and to be able to push foreign elements acting on the battlefield in the desired action using training, advising, accompanying. The concept of a Warrior Diplomat means the ability to negotiate and influence key players in a given environment. Acting as an Integrator or Warrior Diplomat requires not only military experience and education in the cultural field but also the ability to communicate effectively in the language used within the settings. Members of the SOF have the prerequisites to succeed in this area thanks to the selection procedure and subsequent training like languages, interrogating skills, advanced tactical skills, and technical skills.

Conventional Forces (CF) are not designed for the multi-tasking of individual members. CF are primarily intended for offensive and defensive operations in large formations. The organizational structure and doctrine of CF do not allow for very specialized training of individuals. The main reason is the loss of capabilities of these elements like team, squad, and platoon in case of lack of individual members. Unlike CF, NATO SOF are trained and designed to execute the Military Assistance (MA) covertly. It is also worth mentioning that SOF can be

deployed as a gesture of providing the best forces with regard to making a foothold in the country. The General Stanley McChrystal, U.S Army (ret.) in his book *Tem of Team* mentions how the Task Force assigned the SEALs Operators to the Host Agencies to build trust and provide expertise²⁶. This act was successful for making relationships among the agencies, but at the same principle it can work among states. Moreover, as stated in the article “Pulling Troops Out of Africa Could Mean Another Endless War”:²⁷ “Russia has little to offer Africa beyond arms and mercenaries, but China has made large investments in infrastructure and development, in addition to a pledge to expand its military presence on the continent.”²⁷ By deploying NATO SOF advisors as Warrior Diplomats to those countries, NATO can prevent the influence of adversary countries. Members of SOF are predestined, mainly due to their selection and subsequent training, to build the capacity of indigenous forces. Given the numbers of these forces, unlike Conventional Forces, it is possible to focus on specialized training leading to the achievement of the necessary skills. SOF enable the achievement of the highest levels in the training and assistance of indigenous units, especially due to the set system and selection staff.

Direct Action (DA) performed by SOF should focus in particular on tasks, that require precision execution and reduction of collateral damages such as High-Risk Arrests and Hostage Rescue. DA activities are demanding in terms of accuracy of execution, specialized training, and material, and their mastery goes beyond the level of training that is standardized in conventional units. Also, the target discrimination ability requires additional training and sufficient resources. The U.S Navy Admiral William H. McRaven (ret.) states in his book *The Theory of Special Operations* that the success in DA mission tasks is based on the following principles, “simplicity,

²⁶ Stanley Gen McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*, Illustrated Edition, New York: Portfolio, 2015, 217-219.

²⁷ Herman J. Cohen, *Pulling Troops Out of Africa Could Mean Another Endless War*, War on the Rocks, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/pulling-troops-out-of-africa-could-mean-another-endless-war/>.

security, repetition, surprise, speed and purpose,”²⁸ and additionally he claims that the principles are rarely achievable for large forces. Furthermore, operations of this kind are, in the context of maintaining secrecy, demanding Operational Security (OPSEC) both towards the execution itself and at protecting the identity of members of SOF within the framework of possible retaliation. Also as stated in the book *The Kill Chain* by Christian Brose that SOF should, “assess candidates and identify the ones who are predisposed to bearing the cognitive and physiological loads of close-quarters combat, where individuals must understand, decide, and act precisely and repeatedly in split seconds.”²⁹ It means that SOF's selection process shows how the preparation for DA is demanding from the start. Conventional Forces (CF) do not have the luxury of selecting the personnel like SOF do, thus SOF are likely more suited to fulfil the challenging DA. The risk, secrecy, and reduction of collateral damage must also be taken into account when performing this type of task. DA-type tasks do not necessarily belong exclusively to SOF; however, the missions with higher risk or demands of advanced training especially in the area of target discrimination should remain the responsibility of SOF.

Special Reconnaissance (SR) carried out by SOF should focus mainly on the collection and analysis of information in the urban areas and from the human domain. The built-up area represents the most difficult and complex environment for information collection, which requires a high degree of creativity, adaptability, and knowledge of the environment. Collecting information from human resources requires quality language training, social intelligence, and communication skills, and the training is time consuming. Mark M. Lowenthal, who spent almost his whole career in the intelligence community, states in his book *Intelligence* that:

²⁸ McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 7.

²⁹ Christian Brose, *The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare* (New York: Hachette Books, 2020), 108.

“HUMINT requires time to be developed...it takes up to seven years.”³⁰ It is almost impossible to develop those professionals in the environment of Conventional Forces. The human domain is the only one from which devices are unable to gather information due to their inability to read human minds. The only way to get information is for people to interact with each other. Gathering information is the activity of every soldier. Standard patrol techniques are usually a routine activity of deployed soldiers. On the other hand, the collection of information in a complex environment and from human resources requires a considerable degree of training and skills, including the necessary education. The tasks of the SR do not necessarily belong only to SOF. It is important to take into account the difficulty of completing the SR tasks, the value of the information obtained, and the possibility of compromise.

Area number two deals with the system set up.

The policymakers must clearly distinguish tasks between Conventional Forces (CF) and SOF. CF have been performing some of the core tasks in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that used to be the domain of SOF like training of indigenous units and the execution of Direct Actions to Kill or Capture. The standardization of SOF procedures for Conventional Forces (CF) leads to a general awareness of these procedures and thus a loss of the moment of surprise, which is crucial for special operations. Sufficient explanation of capabilities and terminology to the superiors will prevent the misuse of SOF for tasks that are not intended for them and are thus a waste of potential of SOF. In addition, it will prevent debates as to whether or not CF can do SOF work.

According to one of the imperatives, SOFs are not mass-produced, and therefore the numbers of SOF cannot be compared in size with Conventional Forces (CF). The large-scale

³⁰ Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, 8th edition (Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2019), 138–39.

deployment of SOF in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has worn them down and credited a need to deploy CF for similar tasks. The involvement of CF has raised a number of questions among some senior officers about what makes SOF better than CF and why investment in SOF units is needed. Linda Robinson, Austin Long, Kimberly Jackson, and Rebeca Orrie in their report *Improving the Understanding of Special Operations* claim that: "The evidence suggests that, at a minimum, policymakers and perhaps Conventional Force (CF) commanders in senior military positions may not understand the specific requirements for successful employment of SOF."³¹ If CF can perform special operations then why is it necessary to build SOF? Besides, the financing of SOF represents a great burden on the state budget. Furthermore, the application of special operations procedures in conducting combat operations leads to the loss of the moment of surprise, because the enemy can count on the possibility of using these procedures.

The Theory Outside the Box: A New General Theory of Special Operations by Thomas Searl Ph.D. can be used to distinguish the roles of SOF and Conventional Forces (CF). SOF should in the future focus on tasks that go beyond Conventional Operations. Using his theory, it is easy to sketch the boundaries between the tasks of SOF and conventional units. The application of Outside the Box theory would allow the effective use of force for the tasks for which they are trained and predestined. Distinguishing roles between conventional silos and SOF is one of the key elements of the future of SOF. Outside the Box theory simply shows the way to achieve this. It is imperative to revise the main tasks of SOF in the context of the doctrine of Conventional Forces so that they comply with the principles of special operations and SOF will remain relevant in the future.

³¹ Linda Robinson, Austin Long, Kimberlz Jackson, and Rebeca Orrie, *Improving the Understanding of Special Operations: A Case History Analysis*, February (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation,2018), 204, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2026.html.

SOF system must be as efficient as possible in generating of forces, capability, and the deployment of SOF. The desired end state is that SOF are deployable in the speed of decision. Some adversaries do not have constraints like the SOF has – bureaucracy, law, doctrines, constraints in training, or buying weapons and other equipment. So the enemy can act without limits, which gives to the enemy the advantage of speed and surprise. Besides the enemy is in the fight all the time, so it can improve its fighting skills in contrast with NATO. NATO provides the units for the conflicts, but those units are not in the fight all the time but mainly improve in the Train, Advise, Accompany tasks. Also, the deployment lasts only a certain period of time, followed by an extended idle time period.

The achieving of the end state, which is rapid deployment of SOF in a speed of decisions, means to adjust mainly the legislative and the acquisition system for buying military stuff. The current deployment of SOF is associated with the long last approval process at the highest levels. The approval process at the highest level results in the impossibility of secrecy of the deployment of SOF and the speed of their deployment. The system should allow for the covert and very rapid deployment of SOF to avoid unnecessary compromise and the risk of delay.

Acquisition of material is the responsibility of each state. Compliance with government contracts and thus non-infringement of competition rules significantly limit the acquisition process. The enemy can acquire military material in a much faster mode than the regular state can do it. This puts SOF at a disadvantage. The acquisition of new material and its implementation in practice should take as short a time as possible. Deficiencies in the material can affect the fulfillment of the set tasks. Once technologies are fully readied, there might be an almost instant purchase system. Material to help address the threats is available but is awaiting systematic acquisition. This limits the ability to react.

Capacity building means having appropriate and realistic training conditions. The number of training facilities, especially for combat in the built-up area with a real simulation of the enemy and the civilian population, is limited in Europe. Besides, these facilities are also utilized by Conventional Forces (CF) and by international exercises. SOF are thus limited in the possibilities of using these training facilities and must share them with others. It is ideal to combine training on the training ground with practical application. For most NATO nations, the internship means a foreign deployment, which, however, allows only certain tasks to be performed according to the mandate. The ideal for training is to possess adequate training centers which are unfortunately very costly because, in addition to the infrastructure, it would ideally employ the civilian population, which would act in the role of OPFOR.

It would be appropriate to enable SOF to match some of the tasks with the tactics of police special units. SOF, as the pioneers in operational procedures, could further spread the lessons learned into the conditions of conventional units to increase their overall operational readiness. Cooperation with the police seems to be a suitable alternative for practical skills training and psychological training; however, the legislation of several states does not allow this yet. Given the increased threat of terrorist acts and operations involving non-state actors on national territory and hybrid threats, it would be appropriate to allow SOF to strengthen domestic security by conducting special operations. This would strengthen the capacity of the police and speed up action in a larger-scale terrorist attack in the home territory. Also the equipment would be used constantly so the investment would be worthwhile because in the current state the equipment is used for training and for the occasional deployment.

SOF should be able to independently and logistically ensure at least low-visibility ops, which will increase independence and speed of deployment. Special operations are characterized

by logistical self-sufficiency, but this is unrealistic for large-scale SOF actions. Such unit would have the air force, fleet, operations centers, and intelligence centers. For this reason, cooperation with other units is necessary. The total cost of material equipment for low-visibility operations is less costly than the total cost of securing large-conflicts. It is therefore more likely to finance required purchases by each state. Logistic independence in low-visibility ops is not only real but also necessary. The material used is also subject to certain degrees of secrecy so that the counterparty cannot take adequate countermeasures. One of the characteristics of special operations is limited logistical security. Leaving the low footprint, the compactness of the material, and different specifications from the standard material is one of the demands for fulfilling the given tasks. Lastly, the absence of this material leads to unnecessary delays.

The threat that NATO may face in the future will require close cooperation and coordination of troops across NATO and beyond. NATO SOF should be fully compatible and able to coordinate all actions as needed. As mentioned in the paragraph about MA, one of the core tasks of SOF is to promote the relationship according to national or NATO requirements. The relationship will strengthen the ability to cooperate and conduct joint operations in the required level. The papers from JSOU *The Role of the Global SOF Network in Resource Constrained Environment* states about cooperation that, “if nothing else, the Global SOF Network is a relatively inexpensive way to engage partners, learn from other perspectives and cultures, extend some influence and help to troubled nations, and engage enemies that have already been well-defined within the current fight.”³² It is obvious that SOF network must deal with two directions. The First direction should deal with NATO SOF network building capabilities, and the second direction should focus on the partners outside of NATO. If this does

³² Joint Special Operations University Press, *The Role of the Global SOF Network in a Resources Constrained Environment*, ed. Chuck Ricks, Independently published, 2019, 17.

not happen in the future, SOF's activities would be limited to individual small-scale actions, which would limit the full employment of SOF capabilities especially in the large conflict. Therefore, the NSHQ and individual nations should deepen the cooperation of SOF inside and outside of NATO in regular international exercises.

Conclusion

SOF-type units are part of the collective defense provided by NATO. As a force multiplier, NATO SOF fulfills basic obligations. The first group of those results from NATO membership, namely Military Assistance (MA), Special Reconnaissance (SR), Direct Action (DA), which are doctrinally set in *NATO SOF Doctrine AJP 3-5*. The second group of obligations arises from the national interests of each member state.

There are two reasons why NATO SOF should reflect on future challenges to maintain relevance. The first reason is that the world is evolving dynamically, and with it the environment and the threats that will affect the future operation of these units. Among the characteristic features that are most likely to be among the significant features of the future are ambiguity, complexity, speed, and interconnectedness. The second reason stems from the development of Conventional Forces, which in the past were able to perform tasks that previously belonged exclusively to SOF units. This was due to the massive deployment of SOF in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, which due to the small numbers of these units led to rapid wear and tear.

In the future, NATO SOF should focus on several areas of development to justify their need for personal selection, above-standard training and equipment. NATO SOF must revise the core tasks which clearly distinguish between Conventional Forces and SOF. NATO SOF will adjust the training accordingly with the future threats. NATO SOF will set up the system to enable force generation and force projection in line with NATO needs which should help also in tasks derived from national interests of each member state. Last but not least NATO SOF should increase the cooperation across SOF as well as the cooperation with CF in NATO to ensure the interoperability and ability to conduct NATO operations. If developments in these areas do not occur, NATO SOF's ability to face future threats risks being limited.

Even though CF have started to perform tasks that were previously the privileged domain of SOF, this does not mean that SOF have lost their exclusivity. The papers *NATO SOF Study* states about Special Operations that, “those activities deemed “special” are in fact outside the realm of Conventional Operations or beyond the standard capabilities of Conventional Forces.”³³ It means that SOF teams, composed of selected soldiers above standard trained and specially equipped will always be closer to achieving tactical excellence than Conventional Forces in the non-standard missions.

³³ NATO, SOF Study, 2012.

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