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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN DIRECT ACTION. PEACETIME
CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS

A COMPLEMENTARY PAPER TO THE TRANSITION INTERVIEW OF GENERAL
JAMES J. LINDSAY, CINCUSOC



by

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Abstract

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Indeed these are changing times for our world, our traditional opponents, our national priorities, and our armed forces. At the center of this change is a debate on force structure, capability, roles, and missions to deter or fight an enemy at the lower end of the operational continuum. Special Operations Forces (SOF) are highly trained forces which can operate particularly well in what has been described as a "Low Intensity Environment." In this study, the author describes peacetime contingency operations and the generic roles of SOF conducting direct action missions within a theater. He then describes command and control options and senior leader considerations. The study concludes that SOF's flexible employment capabilities in the contingency role and across the operational continuum are at the leading edge of a change in Army priorities to highly deployable, CONUS-based, contingency forces.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN DIRECT ACTION. PEACETIME CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS

Purpose. The purpose of this paper is to describe the generic roles and command and control of special operations forces (SOF) conducting direct-action contingency operations in a theater. The order of presentation will be: general discussions of contingency operations and direct action (DA) missions, roles of Army, Air Force, and Navy SOF elements in DA, command and control options, and a summary of comments.

General. These are changing times for our world, our traditional opponents, our national priorities, and our Army. Some might say that the "handwriting has been on the wall", but the Army's professionals face a crisis. For the first time since Vietnam, we are orienting our priorities away from the Fulda Gap and towards the lower end of the operational continuum. We find ourselves in a doctrinal crisis as we struggle to publish doctrine which covers military operations in peacetime competition and in conflict. Suddenly those "low threat" conditions have grown in importance.

Modern weaponry in the hands of terrorists and narco-traffickers, and drug-related monies available to paramilitary organizations of underdeveloped countries have converted "Low Intensity Conflict" into the Armed Forces' "growth industry". As discussed during a personal interview with CINCUSSOC earlier this year, our officers need to better understand direct action peacetime contingency operations, and how to employ and command/control SOF and conventional forces in this role. Considering the Army's current force design revision toward a centerpiece force-projection capability of CONUS-based contingency corps, and considering the recent and extremely successful contingency operation conducted in Panama, all military professionals can better prepare themselves to serve our future by studying peacetime contingency operations.

Contingency Operations (SOF). "SOF can conduct or support contingency operations. Contingency operations are politically sensitive military operations normally characterized by the rapid and short-term projection or use of military forces in conditions short of war. They usually occur in response to a crisis, but may also involve a large, highly visible buildup of military forces over extended periods."¹

"Peacetime contingency operations are necessary when diplomatic initiatives do not achieve time-sensitive, high-value objectives, or when unexpected threats demand a rapid response. They are often undertaken in crisis avoidance or crisis management situations requiring the use of military instruments to enforce or support diplomatic initiatives. They focus on very specific problems or situations. They are politically and time-sensitive, and managed at the highest levels. They use tailored forces, are usually short in duration, and joint or combined in scope."2

"Peacetime contingency operations include, but are not limited to--

- . Shows of force and demonstrations.
- . Noncombatant evacuation operations.
- . Rescue and recovery operations.
- . Strikes and raids
- . Peacemaking
- . Unconventional warfare
- . Disaster relief
- . Security assistance surges
- . Support to US civil authorities"3

Although contingency operations could involve only conventional forces or a combination of both SOF and conventional military forces, (possibly in connection

with government agencies) this study will focus on unilateral SOF operations. Within contingency operations, SOF could conceivably execute any of their five principal missions or collateral special operations mission activities. In this particular case, we will concentrate on their direct action (DA) mission.

Direct Action. "In the conduct of DA missions, units may employ raid, ambush, or direct assault tactics; emplace munitions and other devices; conduct standoff attacks by fire from air, ground, or maritime platforms; provide terminal guidance for precision guided munitions; and conduct independent sabotage. DA missions frequently occur beyond the range of tactical weapon systems and conventional force. They are conducted by SOF to strike targets inaccessible to or inappropriate for conventional forces or weapons systems."4

"Direct action is conducted by individuals and small units from team to multi-battalion size. Close combat tactics and techniques are employed when the target and mission require precise or discriminate application of force beyond the capability of other forces and weapons systems, or when the mission requires recovery or capture of personnel or equipment. Standoff attacks are conducted in support of close

combat actions or independently when it is determined that the target can be sufficiently damaged or destroyed without the commitment of close-combat type forces."5 To amplify the notion of "discriminate application of force," consider the restrictions both within and around the objective area. Rules of engagement most often require minimal collateral damage, and demand disciplined initiative on the part of all forces.

"(Direct action) operations typically involve:

(1) Attack on critical targets (materiel or personnel).

(2) Interdiction of critical lines of communication (LOC) or other target systems.

(3) Locate, capture, rescue, or recovery of designated personnel or materiel.

(4) Seizure, destruction, or neutralization of critical facilities in support of conventional forces in advance of their arrival."6

Roles of SOF. This study will analyze the possible roles of SOF in strikes or raids. "Strikes and raids can support rescue or recovery operations, or destroy or seize equipment or facilities which are demonstrably threatening to national collective security interests. They can also support drug interdiction operations by destroying narcotics production or transshipment

facilities, or supporting such actions by a host government."7 "Target selection must be the product of careful analysis which fully understands the enemy's center of gravity, confirms its susceptibility to military action and determines the appropriate military action. Common target characteristics are:

- Strategically significant objectives.
- Targets with a high psychological value.
- Key personnel and facilities in hostile areas."8

Although conventional forces may be selected to conduct a specific special operations mission, designated SOF are structured to be the force of choice under most circumstances. "They possess unique capabilities designed to address those missions, regardless of where they are conducted in the operational continuum (see Figure 1)."9 The following paragraphs review possible roles of specific SOF in a raid contingency, by discussing Army, Navy, and Air Force SOF roles.

Army Special Operations Forces. Army SOF (ARSOF) include Rangers, Special Forces, Special Operations Aviation, PSYOPs, and Civil Affairs units.

Rangers. Rangers from the 75th Ranger Regiment provide a significant close-combat capability in direct action contingency operations. They are specially-trained, airborne infantry normally employed

as a battalion, but available in platoon through regimental strength (2,200 men). Rangers are extremely proficient in raids, ambushes, seizing and securing airfields, attacks against soft targets such as C2 nodes, and in selected recovery operations. They are well-prepared to seize a lodgement or to provide security for more surgical special operating forces. They are particularly suited to DA contingency operations as a result of their rapid deployability, their high state of readiness, their intense live-fire training, habitual training with other special operations forces, and strictly enforced operational security requirements. Their superb physical conditioning and environmental training enable them to infiltrate or exfiltrate by ground over extensive distances in extreme conditions.

Operation Just Cause highlights the Rangers' most valuable traits. Following a lengthy aerial infiltration, Rangers parachuted onto remote objectives and overwhelmed the enemy. Their discriminatory fires, strict adherence to rules of engagement, and battlefield discipline were keys to success. Their realistic training program conducted principally in live fire conditions assured a high probability of mission success.

Special Forces. "The Special Forces (SF) Group is a multipurpose combat force organized, trained, and equipped to plan, conduct, and support a variety of SU in all operational environments in peace, conflict, and war. Although principally structured for unconventional warfare (UW), SF units are capable of task organizing (their composition) to meet more specific requirements."10 In the contingency, DA role, Special Forces are capable of several critical functions.

Prior to execution, SF elements may be employed in a special reconnaissance (SR) role in order to obtain specific, well-defined, and time-sensitive information of strategic or operational importance. In addition to SR, SF may conduct tactical reconnaissance of task force objectives. Selected SF teams may be used in a counter-terrorist (CT) or discriminate fire role. Likewise, on a selected basis, SF units are capable of limited direct action missions such as destruction of communications nodes, recovery of personnel or sensitive equipment, or destruction of key facilities. Based on the effectiveness of any ongoing unconventional warfare campaign in the theater, additional SF roles (including indigenous military or paramilitary forces) may support task force contingency operations. Special teams are trained for High

Altitude Low Opening/High Opening (HALO/HAHO) parachute or underwater (SCUBA) infiltration, and all teams are given an area/language orientation. Special Forces team members are normally very experienced and well trained soldiers/leaders who are far more mature than, for example, members of a ranger rifle squad.

During Operation Just Cause, Special Forces teams conducted special reconnaissance and surveillance, direct action to include interdiction of enemy reaction forces, and a series of follow-on missions to help clear Dignity Battalion personnel from designated areas. Not only were their missions vital to the success of initial combat operations, but their ongoing traditional roles are critical to recovery, and for the security of nation building programs in Panama.

Army Special Operations Aviation (SOA). "Army SOA are organized into both single aircraft type and composite battalions which provide a mix of short, medium and long range lift, and limited light attack capabilities. They support SOF in all principal and collateral missions and can conduct autonomous SR and DA missions."¹¹ In contingency, DA roles they can conduct extended range, light lift, precision indirect fires, and emergency resupply or evacuation under adverse flying conditions in other than permissive airspace. In addition they can conduct surveillance,

and electronic warfare, dispense mines, provide terminal guidance for precision munitions, and support C3 for SOF. Army SOA involvement in Operation Just Cause was extensive and most successful, but cannot be released within the scope of this study.

Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) and Civil Affairs (CA). Army and Air Force PSYOPS and Army CA forces are not principally special operations forces but are essential to all operations. In DA contingency operations, CA elements may prepare a civil affairs estimate critical to the planning process. The CA teams, however, are most valuable in UW missions or in the consolidation phase of an offensive campaign. PSYOPS teams can support DA with speaker teams for diversions, "exploiting the operation to disseminate propaganda to target audiences that might not otherwise be accessible, preventing or deterring interference in the DA operation, explaining the purpose of the US contingency action to counter enemy disinformation, and establishing control of non-combatants, neutrals, and other groups in the operational area."¹² These foreign language qualified teams also may assist in battlefield interrogation.

The CA role in the Panama Operation continues to be of critical importance. Although the selected volunteer activation of reserve CA personnel is

controversial, these volunteers were carefully screened, and were quickly deployed to adequately reinforce CA elements in country. Their mission is expected to continue for an extended period. PSYOPs teams played a major role, principally as described above. During the assault, strong leadership and disciplined troops combined with PSYOPs loud speaker warnings to assist all assaulting units' abilities to limit collateral damage and minimize casualties. PSYOP's continued to be a principal player in the consolidation, restoration of law and order, and in the surrender of General Noriega.

AFSOF. The Air Force provides critical capabilities to a DA SOF task force. Their component is formed from "specially equipped fixed wing and verticle lift aircraft, and specially trained aircrews for infiltration, exfiltration, resupply, aerial fire support, and aerial refueling; as well as composite special tactics (Combat Control and Pararescue), and weather support units."13

Special Operations Airlift Aircraft, comprising transport/cargo and verticle-lift resources, provide clandestine or covert penetration of hostile, sensitive, or politically-denied airspace ... in support of UW, DA, SR and CT operations. Fixed-wing aircraft require the capability of utilizing

minimum-length, unimproved landing strips. Vertical-lift aircraft can land in confined areas or hover over selected areas and use rope ladders, hoist, or rappelling/fast rope procedures to infiltrate or exfiltrate personnel."14 Gunships also play a critical role in DA operations. Equipped with a variety of sensors and weapons to acquire and engage static and moving surface targets, they are effective in a close air support, interdiction, and armed escort role. Aircrew and avionics capabilities allow adverse weather operations. AFSOF aircraft participated extensively during Operation Just Cause. Aircrews performed superbly in aerial infiltration, refueling, airdrop and fire support operations. SOF airdrops were precisely on target, and AC 130 gunship fires were hailed for surgical, discriminatory fires which limited US generated collateral damage in the vicinity of the Panamanian Defense Force Headquarters. Other details of these roles remain classified.

NAVSOF. The US Navy's contribution to DA, SOF, contingency missions will normally be Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) teams, supported by SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) teams, and Special Boat Units (SBU). A SEAL team has ten operational platoons, and all personnel are dive, demolitions, and airborne qualified. Essentially, SEALs are capable of the same primary tasks as SF are.

However, the SEALs are highly trained to operate in maritime or riverine environments. They are complemented by SDV teams and SBUs which provide submersible and surface transport for SEAL missions. SEALs maintain the highest degree of physical fitness to support their demanding waterborne and SOF roles. During Operation Just Cause, Navy SEALs disabled Panamanian military aircraft and watercraft. Details are classified.

Command and Control. During peacetime contingency operations, USCINCSOC can be either a supported or a supporting commander. When the mission is extremely sensitive, requires a low-visibility planning effort, or is of such strategic importance to national objectives, the National Command Authority (NCA) may choose to designate USCINCSOC as the supported commander. The best example of this type operation would be a quick reaction rescue mission involving terrorists operating in multiple theaters. Under most contingency situations, the CINC will be a supporting commander, providing augmenting SOF to the theater unified commanders.

When special operations forces are based or deployed in theater, they are in the combatant command (COCOM) of the theater unified commander. "The theater CINC may exercise day-to-day OPCON through a theater

subordinate unified SOC. The theater commander may choose, however, to exercise OPCON through other subordinate unified commanders, joint task force commanders, or service or functional component commanders. For specific operations a JSOTF may be established with OPCON of assigned SOF, or SOF placed under OPCON or in support of conventional force commanders."14

Although command and control could be exercised in any of the above methods, the more likely method during direct action contingency operations would be a JSOTF subordinate to a Joint Task Force. This command arrangement was employed during Operation Just Cause. Open sources verify that a single JTF Commander, LTG Carl Steiner, commanded all fighting forces. A JSOTF, subordinate to LTG Steiner, maintained operational control of all SOF during the initial phases of the operation.

Regardless of method of command and control, commanders should recognize that SOF are highly adaptable to the peacetime contingency operation. Special Operations require a responsive, unlayered chain of command, with maximum emphasis on operational security. Due to their unique characteristics and level of proficiency, SOF can enjoy a high probability of success if our senior leaders:

a. Provide a clear and unambiguous chain of command.

b. Provide for sufficient staff experience and expertise to plan, conduct and support the operations (preferably within a standing warfighting headquarters).

c. Ensure that SOF planners are involved in the complete planning process.

d. Assign SOF to echelons that have the resources to properly employ and recover the force.

Summary. Given the nature of our modern world and the changing threat, military professionals must become well-versed in the role of the military in peacetime competition and in conflict. Accordingly, peacetime contingency operations, and the employment of SOF in these operations, become an increasingly more significant concern for today's leader. SOF are well suited for employment in these operations, to include those requiring direct action. Special Operations Forces are at the leading edge of the change in emphasis to highly deployable, CONUS based contingency units, and will likely succeed when properly employed with doctrinal command relationships. SOF are flexible and adaptable, and capable of employment across the continuum of operations. Operation Just Cause is a showcase not only for the proficiency of SOF, but also

for the close interoperability of Conventional and Special Operations Forces. Let us continue our study of modern warfare in order to meet tomorrow's challenges.

APPENDIX D

OPERATIONAL CONTINUUM VS LIC

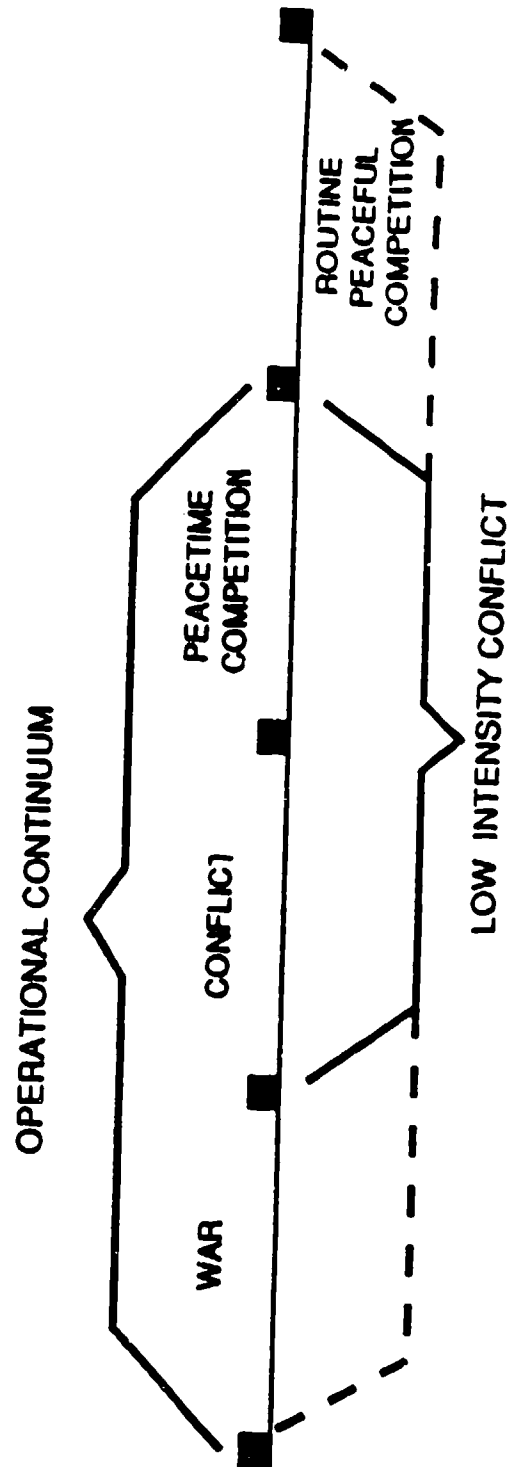


FIGURE 1

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-25, p. 2-15 (hereafter referred to as FM 100-25).
2. U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-20, p. 5-1 (hereafter referred to as FM 100-20).
3. FM 100-20, p. 5-1.
4. U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff Publication 3-05, p. II-9 (hereafter referred to as JCS PUB 3-05).
5. IBID, p. II-10.
6. IBID, pp. II-9, 10.
7. FM 100-20, p. 5-10.
8. IBID, p. 5-11.
9. JCS Pub 3-05, p. II-1.
10. IBID, p. A-1.
11. IBID, p. A-8.
12. FM 100-25, p. 11-12.
13. JCS PUB 3-05, p. II-2.
14. IBID, p. C-5.
15. IBID, pp. 3-4.

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