

**STRATEGY
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PROJECT**

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**REVISITING THE SPECIAL ACTION FORCE (SAF)
CONCEPT FOR USE IN MOOTW/HUMANITARIAN
ASSISTANCE**

BY

COLONEL JOHN Y.H. MA
United States Army

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REVISITING THE SPECIAL ACTION FORCE (SAF) CONCEPT FOR USE IN
MOOTW/HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

by

Colonel John Y.H. Ma
United States Army

Colonel Paul P. Peyton
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: John Y.H. Ma (COL), USA

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The post Cold War era is a complex environment typified by ethnic, religious, territorial and economic tensions. The potential for global war has been replaced by regional instability. Actions involving U.S. military, in the near future, will primarily be in military operations other than war. This paper will review the challenges in MOOTW and determine if the use of the Special Action Force (SAF) concept, developed in the 1960's, is a viable method to meet these challenges. For the purpose of this paper, the focus on MOOTW activities will be limited to peace operations, support to insurgencies, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The Complex Post Cold War Environment.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the United States is now the only remaining superpower. The challenges of a bi-polar world, that of communism versus democracy, have been replaced by a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. Today's world is typified by ethnic, religious, territorial and economic tensions. The potential for global war has been replaced by regional instability, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal drug trafficking, and terrorism.

Similar to the end of World War II, the United States, as the only superpower, is faced with the challenge of maintaining its world leadership role or turning inward toward isolationism. Our current national security strategy of engagement and enlargement accepts the challenge of being the world leader. Our national military strategy implements this through flexible and selective engagement.

There will be many demands for U.S. military involvement to correct the ills of the world. Our national security strategy provides three basic categories of national interest which can merit the use of our armed forces. The first category involves our vital interest, that which involves the

defense of the United States, its citizens, allies and economic well-being. We will do whatever is required to defend these interests to include unilateral and decisive use of military power. The second category is important interest, that which does not affect our national survival, but affect our well-being and the character of the world in which we live. The risks and cost in using military force must be carefully weighed against the interest at stake. The third category is humanitarian interest. In this situation we will be using the unique capabilities of the military rather than its combat power.

Future Military Actions Will Be in Operations Other Than War.

After the dramatic results of the Gulf War, regional adversaries saw the impact of America's military might and the consequences of treading on America's vital national interest. Future adversaries will think seriously about engaging the U.S. in a full scale war. Therefore, any future involvement of U.S. military forces will be mainly situations along the lines of the last two categories described earlier; situations other than combat operations associated with war.

The Joint Pub defines military operations other than war (MOOTW) as, "a wide range of activities where the military instrument of national power is used for purposes other than the large-scale combat operations usually associated with war."¹

Operations other than war, as defined in Joint doctrine, include, but not limited to: arms control, combatting terrorism, Department of Defense support to counterdrug operations, nation assistance, noncombat evacuation operations, civil support operations, peace operations and support to insurgencies.² Army doctrine further expands on these activities to include: humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; attacks and raids; and security assistance.³

This paper will review these challenges found in operations other than war to determine if the use of Special Action Force (SAF) concept, developed in the mid-1960's, is a viable method to meet these challenges. For the purpose of this project, the primary focus will be on the following MOOTW activities: peace operations, support to insurgencies, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The Special Action Force Concept.

During the early days of the Kennedy administration, Special Forces missions overseas greatly increased in number and scope. The Pentagon and units in the field indicated a need for greater capabilities of these unconventional forces.⁴ The SAF concept was developed in the early-1960's to undertake these wide ranging military assistance missions.

The 1,500-man Special Forces Group was augmented by Civil Affairs (CA) Group, Psychological Operations (Psyops) Battalion, Engineer Detachment, Medical Detachment, Military Police (MP) Detachment, Army Security Agency (ASA) unit to form a SAF unit. A total of four SAF units were formed by the mid-60's. One in Asia, formed around the 1st SF Group, the second in Latin America based on the 8th SF Group, another in Africa based on the 3rd SF Group and lastly in the Middle East around the 6th SF Group.⁵

The SAF constituted a source of highly specialized skills responsive to the assistance needs of a host country's armed, paramilitary, and irregular forces. The use of the Special Forces in this role provided a valuable and economical supplement to the Military Assistance Advisory Groups (MAAG).⁶ Subsequent Field Manual changed the term

Special Action Force to Security Assistance Force, using the same acronym "SAF" and same description.⁷

Employment of Special Action Force.

The SAF was primarily employed in "Stability Operations" where U.S. support forces operate in less restrictive environments than that of "Unconventional Warfare." In stability operations, efforts were directed toward countering insurgent movements by assisting host country in denying them the support of the local populace and destroying the insurgents through combat actions.⁸ Stability operations have been redesignated today as foreign internal defense.

The SAF is a specially trained and ready force that is area oriented, partially language-qualified and available to the theater CINC; unit can vary in size and capabilities in accordance to theater requirements. The SAF is commanded by the SF Group Commander; augmentation elements when employed in support of the SAF activities will be either in the SAF chain of command or directly under the MAAG.⁹

During its inception, SAF Asia engaged in civic action programs throughout the Ryukyu Islands. The projects covered included one or more of the three major fields: medical,

engineering and training of selected local inhabitants to ensure continuation of projects after departure of the teams. In 1963, medics from the 8th SAF joined Bolivian doctors and medical workers in alleviating the country's epidemic of hemorrhagic fever. SAF engineers in the region helped local countries open up previously isolated and often impenetrable areas along the Andes.¹⁰ In the late '60s, SAF Asia engineers and medical detachments trained hundreds of Thais in road construction, operation and maintenance of heavy equipment, public health, sanitation and medical care.¹¹

To counter some of the negative publicity from the Vietnam war, Special Forces placed more emphasis to civic action programs in other countries. In 1969, the 1st SF Group formed Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART), consisting of an A-Team supplemented with two doctors and four to six additional medical NCO's.¹² This concept was later used throughout Asia. A few months after this concept was initiated, a DART deployed to Luzon after a typhoon hit the Philippines. Along with members of the Philippine Army, USAID and U.S. Navy, the team entered the flooded area to render aid. SAF Asia also developed an overall plan to

assist the Indonesian Army in establishing a civic action program.¹³

With the end of the Vietnam War, the SAF concept was an early casualty with the drawdown of Special Forces and has been forgotten. Unlike the 1960's, communism and the Soviet Union have been contained. Communism, as an ideology, has been proven inadequate and unsuccessful. Yet many of the challenges facing our military during the early 60's still exist. Special Forces and SAF were created mainly for stability operations and unconventional warfare. Most of these activities today would fall under the overarching term of MOOTW.

The Post Cold War Military.

Containment has now been replaced by engagement and enlargement. The main objectives of our National Military Strategy are to promote stability and thwart aggression. This is done through the three pillars of: peacetime engagement; deterrence and conflict prevention; and fight and win. Most of the operations within the first two pillars fall under MOOTW.

With the end of the Cold War, there have been great demands for the the peace dividends. Reductions in defense spending since the late 1980's have dramatically reduced the size of U.S. armed forces. By the end of the 1990's, U.S. forces in combat formations will have declined by about 40 percent. Active duty military personnel will be reduced from 2.1 million to 1.45 million.¹⁴ This will be the smallest force since the days preceding World War II. Defense outlays as a percentage of federal outlays, dropped from a peak of 27 percent in 1987 to 18 percent in 1994. In terms of constant 1995 dollars, DOD budget authority declined from a peak of \$401 million in 1985 to \$252 million in 1995.¹⁵

Today's military force is much smaller, but mission requirements have not been reduced significantly. Deployments in support of peace operations and humanitarian missions have actually increased significantly. This has resulted in a much higher operation tempo, to include more and longer deployments. With a greater emphasis on reserve component to provide combat support and combat service support roles, this higher operation tempo has also affected the reserve component. The long term effect may result in

lower morale, less inclination to remain in or join the military, either active or reserve.

Another key characteristic of today's military force is the emphasis on jointness. All operations in the last decade have been joint operations. Jointness will not be the panacea for reduced force structure and increased deployments, but will help to increase the efficiency of the services involved. With our reduced forward presence, there is a greater need for rapid force projection. The projection of power is inherently a joint undertaking. The rapid advance of technology and speed of communications, forces on land, air and sea complement and reinforce one another more than ever before.¹⁶

The rapid pace of technology is changing the ways we fight our wars. The high-tech, information age provide us the capability to see farther, strike quicker, deeper and more precisely. Many view Operation Desert Storm as typical future battles where a technologically superior U.S. military force will achieve victory swiftly and decisively with minimum casualties. This scenario will only apply if we fight nation-states the with type of targets that are

vulnerable to high-tech, precision force with a highly accurate intelligence collection system.¹⁷

However, there is the possibility that the high-tech military force we are creating will be irrelevant in executing the most likely challenges facing our nation. These are the challenges associated with MOOTW where the enemies are not nation-states, but religious zealots, ideological revolutionaries, crime syndicates, or drug lords. Unlike nation-states, these enemies do not have defined geographic boundaries, do not mass forces, no readily identifiable infrastructure or armies, and may not have a distinguishable military center of gravity.¹⁸ The great challenge is to adequately adapt our high-tech military force to operate in this low-tech environment. Through their working relationship with developing countries, SOF are experienced in working in a low-tech environment while using high-tech equipment.

We must not lose sight that the primary purpose of our Army is to train and ready to fight and win our nation's wars. In today's uncertain and complex environment, the Army must be ready to meet the challenges of defending our nation and furthering its peacetime security interests.¹⁹ These

peacetime security interests are the challenges the Army will face in operations other than war.

Role of Special Operation Forces in Today's Complex Environment.

How can the military, particularly the Army, best face these challenges in today's VUCA environment with diminishing resources? Perhaps a greater reliance on our Special Operations Forces (SOF) can best meet these challenges. Army SOF include Special Forces, Rangers, Special Operations Aviation, Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations units, are well suited to participate in MOOTW.

Members of the SOF community are generally older and more mature than their conventional force counterparts. Their regional orientation, language capability, and cultural awareness allow them to function well in a politically sensitive environment while maintaining a low profile. SOF are experienced in working in austere environment with local nationals, as well as non-government organizations and private volunteer organizations. Members of the SOF community understand and accept a higher operation tempo and

more deployments. Many join this elite organization specifically for these challenges.

The five principal missions for SOF are: unconventional warfare, direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, and counter terrorism.²⁰ Collateral activities for SOF include: security assistance, humanitarian, anti-terrorism, personnel recovery, special activities, and coalition warfare.²¹ The primary and collateral missions for SOF encompass missions under MOOTW.

SOF's versatility and multiple capabilities provide for quick reaction and rapid deployment. For humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and other crisis, time may be critical. SOF can quickly deploy to a disaster area to provide initial assessment and assistance until additional support from other agencies arrive. SOF's specialized skills in the military arts complemented with their regional knowledge make them an excellent link between the U.S. and the supported country. Their medical, dental, and veterinary specialists are trained to treat regional disease and health problems, while concurrently deal with cultural idiosyncracies of the region that may affect medical care.²² Providing humanitarian assistance in the early critical

stages can reduce much of the needless suffering and dying, and assist developing nations toward eventual recovery.

Quick positive actions by SOF elements may preclude larger and more drawn out operations by conventional forces. Separating belligerent parties before actual conflicts or start of hostilities may preclude sending large peace keeping or peace enforcement forces later when the situation has deteriorated. Use of SOF provides the National Command Authorities the flexibility to respond quickly in a crisis and without the risk of escalation normally associated with employing a larger, more visible, conventional force.²³ Taking the initiative early also reduces the media's ability to mold public opinion during time of disaster and crisis which in turn would place the military in a reactive mode.

Unlike most conventional forces, conducting MOOTW are typical SOF missions and will not degrade their skills and capabilities. Conventional forces normally must be trained up before undertaking peace operations. This training must include regional background and culture, interaction with local citizens, negotiating skills, and rules of engagement. Long term peace operation missions will degrade the fighting skills of combat units thus requiring refresher training

prior to deployment for any combat operations. With their regional orientation and cultural sensitivity, SOF do not require a long train up period. Since these missions are core or collateral SOF missions, there is no degradation of individual or unit skills while performing these operations and no requirement for refresher training afterwards.

Changes in the world situation will place greater demand for forces to respond to diverse regional instabilities. Many of SOF's collateral activities will likely increase and possibly take on greater importance.²⁴ This is especially true of foreign internal defense (FID) which is becoming more complex in the post-Cold War world. Multinational operations is becoming more the norm. Successful FID may promote U.S. interest for global stability at less cost and risks than other means.²⁵

Using SAF Concept in Today's Environment?

Can we learn something from the past? Can the SAF concept, which was originally instituted to contain communism, be effective in today's complex and changing environment? Instead of containment, our national strategy today is one of engagement and enlargement. Like the early

1960's, support of fledgling democratic nations is important, not necessarily for containing communism, but for global stability. Failure of democracies to survive will ultimately affect our national defense and economic interest. Specially trained SOF can play a key role in demonstrating U.S. support for democratic reforms through a range of humanitarian, security assistance, civil affairs, and FID activities.²⁶

This is accomplished by assisting the host country's military in improving their self-defense capabilities and increasing their understanding of the appropriate role of the military in a democratic society.

Perhaps the biggest change today from the early 1960's, when the SAF concept was developed, is the total size of our military. With the collapse of communism, the military budget and force structure have substantially decreased. The draft has long been replaced by an all volunteer force. Current military force structure will not increase in the foreseeable future and may further decrease. Therefore, any proposal to increase SOF structure will be met with strong resistance since it will be at the expense of conventional forces. There is constant pressure to obtain more productivity and efficiency. Privatization is the theme for

today's peacetime Army. Privatization of medical support has substantially decreased medical units and personnel since much of the peacetime medical support is provided by civilian health care providers.

In the SAF concept, a Special Forces Group was augmented with other conventional forces to include a medical detachment. Currently, obtaining additional medical support may be the biggest challenge, since any increase of medical personnel to support Special Forces operations will be at the expense of existing health care. Most of the Army's medical personnel in the combat medical units, such as Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) and Combat Support Hospital (CSH), work at installation hospitals during peacetime. Use of these critical assets will result in reduced support to the installation hospitals.

The SAF concept was effectively employed for disaster and humanitarian assistance. To support operations that were undertaken by the SAF in today's environment, will require pulling the medical personnel from the various installation medical facilities. Since quality of life is a major concern for today's military, disruption of medical support will not be an acceptable option.

Perhaps a better option is to ensure all medical positions in the Special Forces Groups are filled. These medical personnel will be primarily devoted to support Special Forces operations and provide additional support to installation hospital on an "as available basis." Thus providing most of the medical requirements for Special Forces missions without disrupting medical support to installation hospitals. Additional medical support can be provided on an "as needed" basis using detachments from the MASH, CSH, or reserve medical units. This would minimize disruption to peacetime medical care at the installation hospital and use reserve medical units and personnel within the normally programmed period of active duty.

Geographic CINCs and Special Operation Commands.

Each geographic CINC has combatant command (COCOM) of all SOF based in his theater.²⁷ The Army has a Special Forces Group oriented toward each region in support of the respective geographic CINC. In coordination with the respective country team, each CINC has tremendous versatility in responding to different crisis using his SOF assets. Civil Affairs team are well qualified in providing basic

government services where none exists; integrating and coordinating services from other non-governmental and private volunteer organizations.

In today's unstable environment, SOF provide a critical element to peacetime regional plans of the geographic CINCs, the U.S. Ambassadors, and the country teams. Each geographic CINC has his own Special Operations Command (SOC), a subordinate unified command to serve as the functional special operations component. Theater SOCs normally exercise operational control of SOF (except psychological operations and civil affairs forces) within their theaters.²⁸ The SOCs ensure that special operations capabilities are fully integrated in theater planning and other component commands are familiar with SOF capabilities and requirements. The SOC is the framework around which a joint special operations task force can be structured.²⁹

During operations, three types of SOF joint task forces (JTF) may be formed: a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF), a Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (JPOTF), and a Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (JCMOTF).³⁰ These JTFs are organized like conventional task force and formed to accomplish a specific mission, (i.e. unconventional

warfare/foreign internal defense, psychological operations, or civil affairs) or conduct a campaign of limited duration.

A JSOTF consists of units from more than one service, formed to carry out a specific mission or prosecute special operations in support of Joint Force Commander; the JSOTF may have conventional units assigned or attached to support specific missions.³¹ A JSOTF to some degree reflects the former SAF concept in the mid-1960's, without the habitual affiliation of engineer, medical, military police and other conventional units.

Recent Military Operations Other Than War.

In reviewing our most recent operations, what are some of the lessons learned that could be applied to use of SOF and possible the SAF concept? The following will review two of our most recent operations--Somalia and Haiti. At the risk of being overly simplistic and having the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, this review will focus on possible alternative courses of action through use of SOF or the SAF concept.

Somalia.

U.S. involvement in Somalia went through three distinct phases: Operation *Provide Relief*, a humanitarian mission; Operation *Restore Hope*, a humanitarian assistance operation with limited military action; and UNOSOM II, a peace enforcement mission involving active combat and nation building (figure 1).³²

Three Phases of U.S. Involvement in Somalia

Operation	Dates	UN Security Council Resolution	U.S. Commander
<i>Provide Relief</i> (UNOSOM I)	15 Aug 92 - 9 Dec 92	UNSCR #751 dtd 24 Apr 92	(HAST, then JTF) BG Frank Libutti, USMC
<i>Restore Hope</i> (UNITAF)	9 Dec 92 - 4 May 93	UNSCR #794 dtd 3 Dec 92	LTG Robert B. Johnston, USMC
USFOR SOM (UNOSOM II)	4 May 93 - 31 Mar 94	UNSCR #814 dtd 26 Mar 93	MG Thomas M. Montgomery, USA

Figure 1

Although the U.S. had no vital interest in Somalia, we became involved initially strictly from a humanitarian perspective. Many may say we were coerced into this operation from the images of suffering broadcasted by the media. Although there were greater misery in other regions

of the world during the same period, the media focused on Somalia. These images captivated the American public and her political leaders, then the U.S. military became involved. If the geographic CINC and the country team were able to anticipate this potential involvement, could an earlier and less visible action using a smaller force allowed the U.S. to get in and out quickly without being drawn into a larger operation that we were not prepared for nor wanted?

The Somalia after action report, stated that although the personnel in the 10th Mountain Division were very professional, the JTF formed around the Division did not have the staff structure nor the personnel needed to conduct joint operations.³³ The report also cited the importance of Civil Military Operations and the Civil Military Operations Center.³⁴ Key to any peace operation is the requirement of participants to "understand the world at large," familiarity with the country, its culture, and the language.³⁵ Critical to a successful operation is a clear strategy; thorough mission analysis and operation plans leading to clearly defined objectives.³⁶

During the early and mid 1960's, the SAF provided disaster and humanitarian assistance teams and successfully

deployed these teams to render aid. If we had early on deployed an assistance team, built around SOF assets, and rendered aid, coordinated with NGO/PVO for continued assistance, the impact of the media would not have been as great. The American public and the world would have known that despite the ongoing suffering, the U.S. was doing something. Realizing that we cannot cure all the ills of the world nor feed all the hungry, the U.S. can do a small part and then pass the mission to other relief organizations or the United Nations. Early assistance, however small, may have precluded us from a larger and more drawn out role.

Haiti.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president of Haiti on Dec 16, 1990. After only seven months in office, he was deposed in a bloody military coup. On July 3, 1993, LTG Raoul Cedras, commander in chief of the Haitian Armed Forces, bowed to international pressures and joined President Aristide in signing the Governors Island Accord, a ten-step plan to return Haiti to democratic rule. "Unfortunately, the Governors Island Agreement was fatally flawed."³⁷ The UN sanctions were lifted while Cedras and company were still in

power and before Aristide returned to the presidency. There were no enforcement mechanism other than threat of renewed sanction for noncompliance.

On September 23, 1993, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 867, authorizing an expanded mission to support the transition to democratic rule. By the time of the signing of the Governors Island Accord, the UN International Civilian Mission (ICM) consists of about 200 observers. Key to the accord was the need to remove the Haitian police from the control of the Haitian military.³⁸ Two additional components were added to the existing UN mission to accomplish this objective. The International Police Monitors (IPM), about 600 police officers from France, Canada, and other French speaking UN countries, had the mission to train an independent, professional, civilian police force. The other component was Joint Task Force Haiti, consisting of more than 700 U.S. and Canadian military personnel, with the mission to conduct military training and humanitarian/civic action programs in support of Haiti democratization.³⁹

The JTF mission offered an ideal situation for using the capabilities of soldiers in Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations. Military planners expected a

permissive, cooperative environment. Unfortunately, the environment grew increasingly dangerous and JTF had not been configured for that situation. The international force, with only sidearm and highly restrictive rules of engagement, would not have been able to prevent violence and may have been a magnet for it. Violent demonstrations by armed paramilitary organizations greeted the *USS Harlan County* at Port-au-Prince harbor on October 11, 1993.⁴⁰ The next day, the ship departed, with the personnel and equipment that would have started training, medical and construction projects. The *Harlan County* episode reinforced the perception that the U.S. lack resolve and willingness to intervene militarily.⁴¹ The international community, UN and the U.S. lost creditability as a result of this incident.

Almost a year later, at verge of military intervention, only then Cedras and company were willing to step down from power. The 3rd Special Forces Group, with over 1,000 soldiers, were part of the "invasion force." A-teams fanned out to more than 30 towns and villages all across Haiti to pacify an angry populace and help "jump-start democracy."⁴² Typical is A-Team 323 which operated in the small town of Mirebalais with a population of 150,000. With minimal

opposition, the A-team disarmed the 80-man local Army garrison, sent a local corrupt district chief packing, and started working with the local populace in restoring some functions of a community.⁴³ What allowed a dozen Americans to call the shots in "Wild West" town like Mirebalais is the knowledge that the A-team was backed up by a quick reaction force of infantry only 30 minutes away by helicopter.

From Haiti, one can draw a few conclusions on the use of SOF in MOOTW. Humanitarian assistance and training can only be conducted in an environment that has been properly prepared diplomatically and should be configured with adequate organic security. The use of SOF in support of conventional forces can be a great force multiplier.

CONCLUSION.

The U.S. as the only remaining superpower, must provide the required leadership in today's complex environment. The challenges we face, in the near future, will mainly be in operations short of war. The SAF concept, used in the 1960's to contain communism and support friendly governments in stability operations, is very much valid today.

However, the concept of employing Army Special Forces has evolved substantially since the 1960's. Although Special Forces soldiers make up the bulk of SOF, they no longer operate alone, but often as part of a joint task force, fully integrated into the theater commander's campaign plan. Qualities that made them unique then are still desirable today. Currently, Special Forces and other SOF are used less frequently in covert actions, but are employed more overtly in multi-national peace operations, small contingency operations, and FID.⁴⁴ Army Special Forces, with their unique cultural background and language skills, are the ideal force for MOOTW, but they cannot be the "MOOTW force." SOF are limited strategic resource and must be used accordingly. They are not elite assault troops, political warriors, or a foreign legion.⁴⁵ Commitment of SOF in harms way must follow the same rationale for conventional forces.

Much of the employment of SOF today are similar to the SAF concept, less the habitual relationship of conventional forces. With a smaller military, it is probably more feasible not to "fence" augmenting conventional forces for support of Special Forces Groups. A better option would be to ensure all medical positions within the Special Forces

Groups and other SOF units are filled, thus providing the capability for rapid deployment to provided disaster relief or humanitarian assistance using organic SOF assets.

Each geographic CINC through his SOC can fully integrate SOF asset in support of our national military strategy. The JSOTF, augmented by conventional forces or augmenting conventional forces, could be the present day counterpart to the SAF. Humanitarian assistance missions that are smaller in scope and shorter in duration could be undertaken by a JSOTF, augmented by conventional forces like engineers.

The CINCs and country teams must understand and appreciate the unique capabilities of SOF. The appropriate use of SOF provides the CINC and the National Command Authorities an additional option to quickly respond to crisis without the risk of escalation normally associated with employing a larger, more visible conventional force. When employed with conventional forces, SOF can be a great force multiplier.

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