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FIXING US SPECIAL OPERATIONS ARCHIVAL COPY

• RATIONAL ACTORS NOT ALLOWED •

THESIS: The United States Special Operations Command was established as a result of a glaring US military weakness and with the rational consensus of all players.

SCOPE: Several, less than sterling, US military operations in the 1980s, exposed glaring weaknesses in the individual and collective Special Operations Forces of all services--especially with interoperability. In addition, terrorism and military operations at the lowest end of the conflict spectrum placed an ever-increasing premium on "Special Operations" type actions. With a consensus on the existence of a problem(s), surely a Rational Actor solution would emerge. The puzzling aspect from first glance, is that it took a Congressional Act to solve what certainly appears to be strictly military deficiencies. I will examine the Congressional "fix" to our Special Operations problems and the reactions from the key players--including all services. This approach should provide an insight into which model of decision-making is employed, as well as the effects of civilian control of the military.

SOURCES: A combination of reports, studies, articles, and interviews provided this paper's research material.

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Committee 10 *enc. B*

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Why This?

To this day, I can freeze an awful moment in time. Sometimes, in the middle of a long run on a warm summers day, I am once again on an isolated Egyptian airfield in the spring of 1980.

I watch the faces of the troops who are filing off the ramp of the Air Force C130. Their shoulders sag from some unseen weight far heavier than the bulging rucksacks and slung weapons. Jaws are set and eyes hold the thousand mile stare of those who have left comrades behind. It is only fitting that on the faces of the toughest men this nation musters, here and there a tear stain has cleansed a path down a mottled camouflaged cheek. The silence above the roar of the C130's engines is deafening. It would have been little solace for them to know that from the chaos and death in a remote Iranian desert, a unified command was born. Or was it?

I was part of Lieutenant General Vaught's 1980 task force to free the American hostages held in Iran. Seven years later, I authored the ceremony which activated the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) at Macdill Air Force Base, Florida; the command which supposedly resulted from the aborted debacle known as *Desert 1*. This gives me somewhat of a personal stake. And what I--and most military--have always assumed was that the Iran rescue attempt and the Grenada incursion, somehow resulted in a logical, comprehensive fix to the *Special Operations* problems associated with those missions. In establishing USSOCOM as a unified command, all service's Special Operations Forces (SOF) were consolidated under a single four star commander: a master stroke of logic and simplicity. After all, unity of command is a principle

of war! So why did it take a Congressional act?

Special Operations Stepchildren

Because the military refused to acknowledge and solve the problem! A review of the events leading up to the passage in 1986 of the Cohen-Nunn Act which established USSOCOM, is a classic case of military parochialisms forcing Congressional action. It's an uncomfortable path for a soldier to follow: it does not speak well for military objectivity.

SOF have a history of languishing as the second class citizens of all services. A brief spotlight shone by President John Kennedy on Army Special Forces--Green Berets--was quickly extinguished with their drastic downsizing following Vietnam. Army Chief of Staff, General Meyer, sensed the disarray of SOF in the early 1980s and advocated the creation of a *Strategic Services Command*; a unified combatant command to focus on terrorism and insurgency. "By most accounts, the Air Force and Navy combined to block this proposal."¹ In 1982, General Meyer did consolidate Army SOF into a single new command stationed at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.²

Air Force Special Operations AC-130 Gunships were not even funded in the Air Force budget beyond 1979. The deep penetration fixed wing (MC130) and rotary wing aircraft were not receiving adequate attention.³ Senator Sam Nunn recalled in frustration: "...we had to prohibit the Air Force from buying a single F16 jet fighter until the special operations aircraft were purchased. The next year when the intent obviously remained but the specificity

was left out, the special operations planes fell off the Air Force funding line...!"⁴

The Navy was about to decommission its only special operations-capable submarine. The Navy SEALs (Sea-Air-Land SOF) were not systematically equipped or maintained. Equipment invariably resulted from an emergency, rather than from good, long range planning.⁵

The prevailing attitude in the Department of Defense (DOD) seemed one of indifference or even disdain for its SOF. The major Cold War conventional forces of each service received the priority.

The Warning Bells

A series of warning bells did not elicit the kind of rethinking and revamping we would expect from our senior DOD leadership:

- In 1980, the failed rescue attempt in Iran. A story of inadequate deep-penetration air assets: all services guilty.
- In 1983, an attack by a single fanatic, killed or wounded 319 Marines and caused an ignominious US withdrawal from Beirut.
- In 1983 the Grenada operation resulted in a litany of mistakes which have yet to be fully disclosed: employing the nation's best nightfighters in a daylight insertion; drowning the nation's best swimmers; and the inability to communicate between services which negated critical fire

support; to name a few.

- In October of 1985, in response to the Achille Lauro hostage situation involving the Navy SEALs: "The Air Force plane assigned to carry them wasn't in shape to leave the country. After trying three planes, the SEALs finally took off, but they arrived after the terrorists had left the hijacked cruise ship, ending the hostage rescue drama."⁶

The shame of these warning bells is that they were largely ignored by DOD. Aside from incorporating the two measures recommended by the panel (Holloway Board) investigating the Iran rescue failure, the "fixes" were bandaids on a sucking chest wound.

Enter the Congress

Not surprisingly, Congress began to assume an ever increasing interest in Special Operations with the House establishing in 1984, a panel to monitor the progress of SOF. In early 1985, Congressional representative Dan Daniel created a huge stir in DOD with an article in Armed Forces Journal International, advocating the creation of a "Sixth Service" encompassing all services SOF.⁷

There is a bizarre anecdote associated with this famous article. The actual authors were two aggressive advocates for SOF reform, Ted Linger (Congressional staffer) and Lynn Rylander (DOD staffer). These same two authored a counter article entitled, "Two Cases Against a Sixth Service," two months later in the same journal! Noel Koch, a Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Michael Kelly, Deputy Secretary of the Air Force, sponsored the two combined articles. Obviously, these articles took a staunch, opposing view to Representative Daniel's article. It worked! The debate was stirred, and clear cut lines were established; the primary

advocates were Congress for, DOD against the Sixth Service concept. The real goal of placing SOF issues to the forefront, was met in a most appropriate, clandestine manner!⁸

What the Congressional advocates hoped, was that DOD would seize the initiative, create the necessary SOF reform, and preclude any further Congressional "meddling," in what should be the military's business.⁹

Reform was not forthcoming. Eventually, two energetic and extremely knowledgeable Congressional staffers, Chris Mellon of Senator Cohen's staff, and Jim Locher with Senator Sam Nunn, drafted legislation designed to mandate SOF reform in DOD. Representative Dan Daniel had a competing plan. Admiral Crowe, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, responded to the pressure with a proposed DOD SOF reorganization plan as well.¹⁰

Best described as too little too late, the DOD plan was doomed with the testimony of two retired Army generals before House and Senate Congressional committees. LTG Sam Wilson, a SOF legend through three wars, told of his frustration over ineffective DOD action and recommended Congressional mandate as the only sure means for SOF reform.¹¹ A retired general recommending legislation to accomplish *military* business: unbelievable! MG Sholtes, the Grenada Task Force Commander, reportedly provided the most compelling testimony; he spoke of the misuse of his SOF Task Force at the hands of conventional planners and chain of command.¹²

The Senate version, titled the Nunn-Cohen Act, was passed in October and signed into Public Law by President Reagan in November of 1987. Its main provisions were:

- The creation of a Unified Combatant Command (USSOCOM) for all SOF, under the command of a four star general.
- Establishment of an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC).
- To direct the President to establish a Board for Low Intensity Conflict within the National Security Council.

This act was unique. It put Congress knee deep in the military's business and for the first time, formed a unified command by Congressional legislation. Mandating staffing within the Presidents own staff, is also unique and reflects the deep Congressional frustration. The reaction to this act was amazing!

DOD

"Delay on Guerilla Command Irks Hill,"¹³ the 10 March, 1987 Washington Post headline declared. The article described a DOD report from Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger in which he refused to name the ASD/SOLIC until Congress authorized a 12th Assistant Secretary of Defense position of that rank. In addition, no USSOCOM commander had been named. Senator Cohen called the DOD report: "...a contravention of the law..." and one which was asking for further Congressional action.¹⁴

Finally, an ASD/SOLIC nominee came from DOD: Kenneth Bergquist, already in DOD and a vigorous opponent of the SOF legislation from the start. Congress refused his nomination. As an interim response, DOD placed Larry Ropka in the ASD/SOLIC

position under his boss, Rich Armitage, Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs: also a vocal opponent of the SOF legislation.¹⁵ That was enough! Congress passed a law in December, 1987 which appointed the Secretary of the Army, John O. Marsh, as the interim ASD/SOLIC. Two influential and fellow Virginians, LTG Sam Wilson and Representative Daniels, knew that Mr. Marsh would adhere to the intent of the law.

Surprisingly, the prestigious Secretary of the Army, described his ASD/SOLIC duties within DOD as: "...every day was a turf battle."¹⁶ There was feet-dragging at every turn within DOD. His personal courage and persistence were all that insured a positive direction for the ASD/SOLIC until that position was finally assumed by retired Ambassador Charles Whitehouse. This first ASD/SOLIC was confirmed by the Senate *eighteen months* after passage of the legislation.

ARMY

Several battles took place over the assignment of Army forces to the new SOF command. The first was over Reserve and National Guard SOF. The battle of lawyers (Army versus USSOCOM) to date has resulted in SOF Reserve forces assigned to USSOCOM, National Guard forces not assigned, and the unique funding for both still a contentious issue. Also unresolved is the issue of constitutionality of Active Force control over Guard forces.¹⁷

Psychological Operations (Psyops) and Civil Affairs (CA) forces were never officially designated as Special Operations and

according to the Army Staff, did not therefore belong to USSOCOM. It eventually took an order from the Secretary of Defense under the auspices of the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) to assign these vital Army assets to USSOCOM.¹⁸

The assignment of the Army Special Warfare Training Center was opposed by the Army's Training and Doctrine Command. USSOCOM won. The assignment of special Army intelligence assets created a conflict which has yet to be resolved; as is the larger question of service prerogative of intelligence oversight.¹⁹

Every place a gray area existed in the legislation, the Army held firm against the new SOF command. Whether it be missions, units, or money, the parochial Army views were backed by its lawyers. Specificity took precedence over intent in implementing the Congressional SOF legislation.

MARINES

From the outset, Marines wanted and got a chunk of personnel positions in the new four star command, but would provide no forces. The first USSOCOM Chief of Staff, MG Joe Lutz, described the Marine's creation of a "...special operations capable force...with a genuine AT (anti-terrorist) capability. However, the Marine Commandant would not declare these units SOF as they then must be assigned to USSOCOM by law!"²⁰

In 1990, General Gray, the Marine Commandant, told the USSOCOM commander, General Lindsay, that perhaps these Marine "Special Operators" would do better under USSOCOM. The discussion never

resurfaced.²¹

AIR FORCE

The Air Force staunchly opposed the formation of the AFSOC-- the Air Force Special Operations Component--for USSOCOM. Military Airlift Command maintained control of its 1st Special Operations Wing (1st SOW) until the USSOCOM commander personally persuaded the Air Force Chief of Staff to create the 23d Air Force, a major command under USSOCOM, which included 1st SOW.²²

Air Force Reserve SOF assets are still not part of USSOCOM. The search and rescue aspect of SOF aviation was argued for years and is still unresolved.²³ And despite a recognized need, the Air Force refused to support the USSOCOM case for the V22 capability.

NAVY

But it is the Navy which best typifies the parochial in-fighting associated with the SOF legislation implementation. The issue is the SEAL integration. As the SOF legislation was enacted, the senior Navy SEAL and its first Admiral, "Irish" Flynn, wrote a letter expressing a fear for SEAL survivability in the new command. His fear was that they would be "...ground up in a big green (Army) bureaucracy..." and a lose-lose situation for the Navy.²⁴

The Navy, obviously impressed with his position, sent Admiral Flynn to USSOCOM to demand a large portion of USSOCOM headquarters positions for Navy personnel despite not wanting to "play" by

assigning forces (strikingly similar to the Marine position!). Irish describes with glee his heavy-handed exchange with General Lindsay.²⁵ "Seventy five percent of the earth is covered with water," he maintained, "half your headquarters needs to be Navy, to insure adequate maritime understanding and planning."²⁶

Now for the irony. General Lindsay asked that Admiral Flynn be assigned to USSOCOM! In 1987, Irish joined USSOCOM as its J5, Director of Plans and Policy, which involved the assignment of SEALs to USSOCOM. He was now square on the other side of the fence. General Lindsay rapidly and genuinely changed Admiral Flynn's position. The attention to detail paid by the CINC to the SEALs prior to their assignment was phenomenal. Being a diver himself, he knew their language. He actually trained with them and paid close attention to their concerns. It became obvious to Admiral Flynn that the SEALs could only gain by such a powerful and understanding advocate²⁷...the whole idea behind the creation of USSOCOM!

The Joint Staff directed USSOCOM and the Navy to "work it out." This was accomplished in three days of negotiations in Washington. It was Irish and Col Al Vernon, the USSOCOM legal counsel, versus the Secretary of the Navy representatives. Another ironic twist was the Navy civilian legal counsel being an Army Reservist, whom Irish describes as having a "wider than Navy" perspective! At one point, Irish was reminded by his Navy counterparts that, "...we all must return at some point to our service...", a threat he obviously ignored and now almost relishes.

Eventually, Secretary of Defense Weinberger directed the assignment of the SEALs to USSOCOM, as the law specifically directs. When Mr. Carlucci replaced Mr. Weinberger, the Navy actually surfaced the question again with the same results.

Congress Revisited

Congress kept very well appraised of the reluctance of DOD to comply with the spirit and intent of Cohen-Nunn. In addition to the above, the services were stalling on equipment acquisition, distribution of funds, and countless other aspects of full SOF legislature implementation. Locher and Mellons made numerous on-site visits to all the services SOF. They were well aware.

As a result of the DOD resistance, Congress passed ever more confining legislation over the next two years. Full budget authority under Major Force Program 11 was granted to CINC USSOCOM: the only unified or specified CINC with such authority. The CINC was also made Head of Contracting with his own Research, Development, and Acquisition (SORDAC) authority. This infringement on previously sacred service turf, was bitterly accepted. However, the threat of even more restrictive legislation softened the DOD resistance. It was now obvious that, like it or not, SOF was a priority which DOD would be forced to maintain; Congress had demonstrated that it was no paper tiger in this fight and the gloves were off!

Conclusion

There remains much to be done. SORDAC is not a viable entity yet. Kinks are still being worked out of the budgeting process. Here and there an assignment of forces issue still lurks. But the fact remains that the United States Special Operations Forces are at a readiness unparalleled in our history. The proof is in the superb SOF performances in Panama and the Gulf since the formation of USSOCOM. And in reality, we have our oft-maligned, but in this case highly effective United States Congress to thank for it. What a hard pill for a *military* man to swallow!

END OF PAPER

Summary

What has evolved in this paper, solely unintentionally, is the ultimate Case Study to tie in all of Course III. This case does the following:

- Dispels the Rational Actor Model in DOD/Congressional discourse and decision-making.
- Sheds a new light on those who view the Congress as constituent slaves, incapable of pursuing the national interest.
- Sheds a new light on those who view DOD and their individual service through rose-colored, rational actor spectacles.
- Demonstrates without question, the advantages associated with civilian control of the military.
- Provides the future leaders of the military services a

perspective which crystallizes the need for a Joint and National, objective view of issues; perhaps with a vow not to let rigid service parochialisms steer them away from the *right* course.

The real shame of this case is that somehow, sight was lost of why we left comrades behind at Desert 1 and what should be done to make their sacrifice not totally useless. It shouldn't have taken our legislature to point the way.

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