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Creating a NATO Special Operations Force

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Overview

In the post-9/11 security environment, special operations forces (SOF) have proven indispensable. SOF units are light, lethal, mobile, and easily networked with other forces. While the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies have extensive SOF capabilities, these forces are not formally organized to collaborate with one another. There would be much to gain if U.S. and allied SOF trained to work together: national SOF assets would be improved, obstacles to effective combined operations would be removed, and a coherent Alliance capability would be readily available for NATO.

The Alliance can focus and grow its SOF capabilities by providing a selective and small combined "inner core" of NATO special operations forces for operations, while using an outer network to expand and improve SOF cooperation with interested allies.

Special operations forces (SOF) have proven invaluable over past decades and have become indispensable in the post-9/11 security environment. They can be used to prevent terrorist attacks, rescue hostages, train foreign forces for unconventional operations, seize critical facilities, scout in hostile territory and forbidding terrain, and pave the way for intervention by regular forces. Such versatility is possible because SOF combine physical fighting prowess with technological dexterity. They can use lasers, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and global positioning system devices to spot enemy targets and then transmit the data to precision-strike air forces. SOF units are light, lethal, small, mobile, and easily networked with other forces. In addition, SOF are uncommonly enterprising and adaptable—important qualities in these fluid and unpredictable times.

While SOF operate in small units, there are proven advantages to organizing them to function across structural boundaries. In 1987, the United States created a joint U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), made up of SOF from the Army, Navy, and Air Force, with a unified headquarters and separate program budget to fund equipment and training requirements. This step has given the United States an exceptionally cost-effective instrument of military action and national strategy. Although the USSOCOM annual budget ($6.5 billion) is only 1.5 percent of the U.S. defense budget, SOF are used in nearly every combat operation and are spearheading the fight against a transnational Salafist-terrorist insurgency—namely al Qaeda—around the globe in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, Africa, and elsewhere.

While the nature of SOF is such that their missions evolve with the environment, table 1 describes those missions for which U.S. SOF now organize, train, and equip. The recent Department of Defense *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report* reveals a growing recognition in U.S. defense circles of the heightened importance of SOF for combating the global jihad and other irregular threats.

Most North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies of the United States appreciate the value of SOF capabilities for such missions and possess them in one form or another and under one name or another.[1] Table 2 summarizes these forces.

In addition, some allies have high-performance commando and elite paramilitary forces that are not assigned to their defense ministries. Within Spain's *Guardia Civil*, for example, are some of the world's finest counterterrorism forces (reflecting Spain's long struggle with Basque separatists, who use terror tactics). While most allies have small forces to perform missions for which the United States has SOF, several larger allies, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Poland, have SOF-type forces in significant numbers capable of a wide range of missions. Quantitatively, the combined SOF-type capabilities of NATO allies are roughly half those of U.S. SOF. This represents significant capacity for global efforts, provided the forces can be organized to work and fight together against common threats such as al Qaeda.

However, the SOF of NATO members, including the United States, are not organized to collaborate for the purpose of improving capabilities, increasing preparedness, or operating jointly. NATO has on occasion requested U.S. and allied national SOF for specific Alliance contingencies, such as those in Bosnia and Kosovo. Moreover, some useful but minor U.S.-allied bilateral SOF cooperation

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Table 1: U.S. Special Operations Forces Missions

Counterterrorism	Disrupt, defeat, and destroy terrorists and their infrastructure
Direct Action	Raid, ambush, or assault critical targets in hostile or denied territory
Special Reconnaissance	Complement national and theater intelligence by obtaining specific and time-sensitive "ground truth"
Unconventional Warfare	With local forces, respond to guerrilla warfare, insurgency, subversion, and sabotage
Foreign Internal Defense	Train, advise, and assist host-nation military, paramilitary, and civil forces to help protect free and fragile societies
Civil Affairs	Coordinate U.S. military activities with foreign officials, U.S. civilian agencies, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations
Psychological Operations	Influence foreign views and behavior
Humanitarian Assistance	Deliver critical relief where and when others cannot
Search and Rescue	Extract personnel from enemy territory or denied areas when conventional combat search and rescue capabilities are insufficient
Information Operations	Interfere with adversary information and information systems while protecting U.S. systems
Collateral Mission Areas	Perform operations that include security assistance, counterdrug operations, and peacekeeping

in Europe is currently sponsored by the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM). But, other than allied SOF embedded in the NATO Response Force (NRF), NATO has no SOF capability, nor has the Alliance made it a top priority to expand, improve, and fit together member SOF capabilities.

Thus, what NATO does best—enhancing and melding multilateral capabilities for combined action—it has not done with regard to SOF. These scarce, high-value forces are increasingly essential to the shared security interests of members on both sides of the Atlantic, and SOF of all allied countries could benefit from working together. NATO can improve in this area and should.

Much could be gained through sharing of know-how and best practices, and interoperability could be forged through SOF exchanges, training, and exercises under NATO. National SOF could be improved, and obstacles to effective combined special operations could be removed. Beyond this, a strong case can be made for creating a NATO SOF force. If history since the end of the Cold War is a guide, most future contingencies in which NATO may elect to act with force *as an alliance* will require SOF. This argues for making U.S. and allied SOF assets readily available, not as disparate and disjointed ad hoc national contributions, but as a coherent, combined force. Because many allies have SOF, because SOF can be effective in small numbers, and because U.S. SOF have a tradition of working well with friends, creating a NATO SOF capability is a practical and affordable option.

In sum, the United States and its allies have an opportunity to enhance and use SOF collaboratively to the benefit of each and all. While NATO members are not the only countries with real or potential capabilities of this sort, the Alliance is the best mechanism to organize SOF cooperation and mount combined special operations. A way could be found for "partners" and other countries to join.

The goals of expanding, improving, and employing combined SOF capabilities in NATO are, however, up against a serious constraint. For the United States and others, these forces are treated as scarce (in Pentagon jargon, *low-density*), high-value, national assets with sensitive methods and means, unique abilities, and critical missions. This raises concerns about any initiative that could place SOF under other than strictly national control, reduce SOF availability for unilateral use, and share SOF know-how with any but the closest allies—concerns that a design for NATO SOF must address.

Against this background, the pages that follow aim to answer several questions:

- Why is this the moment to consider a SOF capability for NATO?
- What can be gained by creating NATO SOF?
- Given the aims and constraints, what form should NATO SOF take?
- What steps should the United States, allies, and NATO take to make it happen?

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Why Now? The Fight against Terrorists

The urgency of the idea of NATO SOF lies in the particular relevance of SOF in the fight against transnational terrorism and the benefits of conducting this fight multilaterally, a declared goal of the

United States and its allies. Generally speaking, SOF are more useful than regular military forces for finding and eliminating terrorists. They were successful against al Qaeda in Afghanistan immediately after 9/11 and continue to play an important role in Iraq, the Philippines, and other areas.

The terrorist threat from Salafist extremism has mutated since the collapse of the Taliban, becoming less centralized, hierarchical, coherent, and concentrated. While al Qaeda has been partly decapitated, disorganized, and scattered, its new form—unstructured, flattened, distributed, and ever-changing—is harder to locate, isolate, and destroy. The operational challenge associated with defeating terrorists is, as the Department of Defense (DOD) sees it, to find, track, and engage them, whether in remote and rugged terrain or in crowded cities.[2] This is often best done by sophisticated nonmilitary means such as intelligence collection and operations, proactive investigation, and high-performance police-commando units. But there are cases and places in which the capabilities, concentrations, and methods of terrorists exceed the firepower and reach of nonmilitary services. In these situations, SOF provide a unique set of counterterrorism capabilities. Indeed, because terrorists are unlikely to congregate as they did under the Taliban in Afghanistan, conventional forces may not be as effective against them, making SOF the most important military counterterrorism capability. Counterterrorism is, in fact, now the number one SOCOM mission.[3]

Why are SOF so valuable for this task? Given the changing threat and operational problems it poses, counterterrorism action demands a particular package of qualities: readiness, deployment range and speed, inconspicuousness, stealth, daring, sensor-shooter integration, sure but discriminating lethality, initiative, ingenuity, opportunism, cognitive speed, comfort with local forces, flexibility (antidoctrinaire), and adaptability. Among military forces, SOF match up especially well with these demands.

The United States is not alone in regarding the al Qaeda threat as serious enough to justify special capabilities and operations beyond ordinary law enforcement. While our European allies have tended to stress police over military forces, the magnitude of the

Table 2: Allied Special Operations Forces Capabilities

Country	SOF Capabilities
Belgium	1 para-commando brigade (2 paratroop/parachute, 1 commando, 2 mechanized infantry, 1 reconnaissance squadron, 1 artillery)
Bulgaria	1 special forces (SF) command
Canada	1 commando unit
Czech Republic	1 SF group
Denmark	1 SF unit
France	2,700 SOF: 1 command headquarters, 1 paratroop/parachute regiment, 1 helicopter unit, 3 training centers (48); 500 marine commandos in 5 groups: 2 assault, 1 reconnaissance, 1 attack swimmer, 1 raiding
Germany	1 SOF division with 2 airborne (1 crisis response force), 1 SF command (1 commando/SF brigade)
Greece	1 special operations command (including 1 amphibious commando squadron), 1 commando brigade (3 commando, 1 paratroop/parachute squadron)
Italy	naval special forces command with 4 groups: 1 diving operation, 1 navy SF operation, 1 school, 1 research
Latvia	1 SF team
Lithuania	1 SF team
Netherlands	1 SF battalion
Norway	1 Ranger battalion
Poland	1 special operations regiment
Portugal	1 special operations unit; 1 commando battalion
Spain	special operations command with 3 special operations battalions
Turkey	SF command headquarters; 5 commando brigades
United Kingdom	1 Special Air Services regiment, 1 marine commando brigade, 1 commando artillery regiment, 1 commando air defense battery, 2 commando engineer units, 1 landing craft squadron

Source: All figures from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2004–2005* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings, compounded by smoldering extremism in segments of Europe's Islamic population, has made allies aware that *both* police and military forces may be needed. Moreover, Europeans are acutely aware of the potential for North Africa to become a platform for terrorism. Under these circumstances, it should not be difficult to reach a consensus in NATO on the importance of having more specialized military capabilities for counterterrorist action.

Although counterterrorism is the most compelling reason for a SOF capability in NATO, such a capability would serve the Alliance in many other ways as it increasingly faces irregular, elusive, nonstate threats, as well as some state threats. The list of current U.S. SOF missions highlighted in table 1 suggests the broad and enduring value these forces could add to the Alliance in an uncertain future.

What Is To Be Gained?

The United States and its allies can gain in three ways from creating a SOF capability in NATO: by enhancing allied (specifically, non-U.S.) SOF capabilities available for use against common threats; by expanding and regularizing the access of U.S. SOF to valuable and complementary experiences, techniques, and perspectives of allied SOF; and by creating the option of decisive NATO action using SOF. The following examples provide specifics.

Improved Allied Capabilities

It is certainly in the interest of the United States to increase the availability and quality of allied SOF for counterterrorism missions. While some allied SOF may compare well with U.S. SOF in specific skills and tasks, the following *core* U.S. capabilities may be viewed together as a "gold standard," especially when it comes to finding, tracking, and eliminating terrorists:

- surveillance in dangerous and inaccessible areas
- urgent insertion and assault (by land, sea, or air)
- high but highly discriminating lethality
- rapid world-wide deployment and employment
- improvisation during operations
- self-sufficiency
- all-terrain capability (from mountainous to tropical to arctic to urban)
- information networked.

NATO SOF could both enlarge and improve allied SOF capabilities against this standard, thus increasing overall military capacity to fight al Qaeda, as well as to meet other national security goals. Because some allies already have significant numbers of SOF, the main benefit would come from orienting them more (but not exclusively) toward counterterrorism and upgrading their capabilities for that mission. Given global demands on U.S. SOF, enhancing allied capacity would be helpful, whether or not U.S. and allied SOF combine for operations.

Improved U.S. Capabilities

Though excellent, U.S. SOF are not superior in every mission or skill-set. They would be the first to admit how impressed they are when exposed to their allied counterparts, from British tropical commandos to Norwegian arctic rangers to French undersea divers. Collaboration with NATO forces would better enable U.S. SOF to examine alternative approaches, innovations, and niche capabilities. It also might permit specialization, in that U.S. SOF would know where certain allied capabilities exist that they need not duplicate. In particular, allied SOF can expand the available linguistic skills inventory.

NATO SOF also would enhance the ability of U.S. SOF to operate in cultural settings known better to allies. Deep cultural awareness and access can be essential for SOF effectiveness in operations and in developing indigenous antiterror forces. This would apply anywhere in Europe, but also in parts of Africa and the Middle East, thus covering the three regions of main concern to NATO. Because Europe, Africa, and the Middle East are principal theaters of Islamist terrorist activity, U.S. SOF must make every effort to operate effectively in these regions.

An Alliance Capability

One of the tenets of NATO is that shared security interests endangered by common threats are best defended with effective unified action. A multinational response can bring more capabilities to bear as well as signal solidarity and collective will against enemies. Driving a wedge between the United States and its allies is a known priority for al Qaeda, as attacks in London and Madrid show. Unified action can also ensure the sharing of risk and responsibility—the political keystone of the Alliance. These principles are as crucial in the fight against al Qaeda as they were in the days of East-West confrontation. From NATO's least powerful member to its most powerful, all countries are better served operating within an alliance compared to operating alone or with just one or two other powers, provided effectiveness is maintained. Done right, NATO SOF could advance both unity and effectiveness.

The ultimate goal of NATO SOF should be to expand the capacity, improve the capability, and multiply the options for combined action, ranging from surveillance, to working with local forces, to direct assault. Although the United States has significant national SOF capabilities that can be used worldwide, operating with allied SOF could be advantageous. Certainly in Europe, and arguably in much of Africa and the Middle East, combined U.S.-allied SOF action is politically more acceptable and supportable than U.S.-only action.

If U.S. and allied SOF are called on for combined operations, their effectiveness and impact would obviously be greater if they

were interoperable and trained to common standards of excellence. In addition, having high-quality allied SOF readily available to NATO would provide options to act against al Qaeda or other enemies if U.S. SOF are otherwise engaged or, for some reason, not ideal for the need at hand. While the United States may not wish to count absolutely on the availability of NATO SOF, it is an option well worth having. By the same token, it would be advantageous for allies to have SOF capability of enough quality and quantity to join counterterrorism operations with the United States or to conduct such operations of their own when U.S. assets are unavailable.

It is crucial for governments to have public support in the fight against terrorism. NATO SOF would permit the Alliance to take swift, precise, proportional, and collective military action against terrorists, as well as other unconventional threats. Depending on circumstances, use of SOF in surgical operations may enjoy greater public support and international acceptance than large-scale intervention by regular ground and air forces.

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To act decisively with SOF, NATO would need forces that are ready and able to work well together. This means that contributing allies, including the United States, would have to assign some SOF to NATO for training and employment. In other words, for NATO to be able to achieve both unity and effectiveness in combating transnational terrorism militarily, its members' SOF must prepare together and be organized to act together. Occasional contacts will not suffice. Herein lies the biggest challenge, given the national value and sensitivity of SOF.

Creating and Using NATO SOF

For the United States, as well as other prospective SOF contributors, the question is whether assigning such valued assets and sharing sensitive know-how via NATO would compromise national capabilities and limit national options. Therefore, the approach to creating SOF capability in NATO must maximize national and common benefits while minimizing national costs and risks. The key to this is a formula that provides a selective and small combined capability for critical operations while also expanding and improving SOF through cooperation among all interested allies—that is, both to *focus* and to *grow* SOF capabilities. To this end, NATO SOF should consist of a small inner core and a larger outer network.

Inner Core

The inner core could be a force of 500, with associated systems (for example, vehicles, weapons, information technology, and unmanned aerial vehicles). The force could consist of deployable command, control, computers, communications, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C^4ISR) personnel and gear; assault units; and support capabilities, such as lift and logistics. The number of actual assault troops could be between 150 and 200—a small number but with huge utility. The core force should focus initially on one or at most two vital missions: counterterrorism, as stressed here, and perhaps the related mission or submission of hostage rescue.

Counterterrorism missions go far beyond SOF dropping from helicopters by ropes at night into terrorist camps or storming occupied buildings. SOF must be able to function clandestinely for extended periods in areas where terrorists might lurk, collecting intelligence, strengthening local forces, and apprehending killers. Thus, NATO SOF could be very active rather than standing by for rare use. Nations deciding whether to contribute units should fully expect that they will be used.

The nature of the terrorism threat is such that the inner core of NATO SOF should be able to conduct protracted clandestine operations as well as to deploy urgently in the event of sudden dangers to Alliance members and interests. Except for a permanent command and control (C^2) cell, the core force would be composed of *rotating* national SOF units, thus permitting high readiness, a manageable burden on individual allies, and wide learning. National units could rotate into the inner core every 3 months, possibly staggered to increase continuity and exposure to different allied SOF. Three months may seem short, but a longer period might burden unit and personnel planning, while a shorter period might harm effectiveness. SOF are highly trained and motivated troops who get to work quickly and produce results efficiently. Participating forces would be intensively trained to common high standards and chosen tactics. The need to train together and to be ready to operate together means that national forces comprising the core would need to be co-located in Europe or North America.

Organizationally, this inner core could be akin to the way the United States prepares and uses SOF for critical continuing missions. NATO could form a standing joint task force (SJTF) within Allied Command Operations to which assault teams, or units of action, and support resources are assigned rotationally and kept at a high level of readiness.[4] This SJTF–SOF–C/T (for counterterrorism) would provide a focal point for planning, be responsible for results during rotational assignments, and serve as a deployable command and control to minimize reaction time.

For strategic, political, and operational reasons, the United States should participate substantially but not overbearingly. If the NATO SOF consisted of three assault teams at any moment, the United States might provide one and allies the other two. The two allied teams would rotate from members that possess requisite numbers of high-quality SOF, for example, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Poland.[5] A U.S. officer should have permanent (nonrotating) command of SJTF–SOF–C/T, with an allied deputy (rotating or nonrotating). Command of each assault team would lie with the country providing that team in rotation. While each team would come from one nation, interteam collaboration in training and operations is

crucial. SOF assault teams must be able to rely on one another, especially in larger and more demanding contingencies.

With this formula, the total number of U.S. personnel assigned to NATO SOF at any given time would be about 100, including assault and support personnel. Army, Navy, and Air Force units should all participate. There are at least three ways the United States could meet its obligation while not detracting from—indeed, while enhancing—national SOF:

- In the first, the U.S. team in rotation to NATO SOF would come from those teams in the queue for high-readiness status for U.S. counterterrorism operations. This would mean that no increase in U.S. SOF would be needed for the counterterrorism mission. At the same time, it could increase the strain on U.S. SOF, which would have to be weighed against the advantages of having NATO SOF.

- Alternatively, if DOD deemed it useful to increase SOF specialized for counterterrorism based on its latest threat assessment, the additional U.S. capacity could satisfy the needs of U.S. participation. Even then, however, it would be ideal to rotate all or most U.S. counterterrorism teams through NATO SOF to expose them to allied capabilities and alliance operations.

- A third option would be to utilize the U.S. SOF that are already assigned to USEUCOM under Special Operations Command Europe to participate in NATO SOF (in effect, wearing a second helmet). While this would be the most practical option for the United States, it would forfeit the benefits of widespread exposure of U.S. SOF to NATO. Moreover, USEUCOM SOF are not dedicated to the counterterrorism mission, which would be a disadvantage insofar as NATO SOF should concentrate on counterterrorism.

Perhaps NATO and national planners, including USSOCOM, will devise other alternatives. If so, key principles to maintain include:

- substantial, as opposed to token, U.S. participation
- ready availability for operations under NATO
- capability for combined action based on common best tactics and co-training
- rotational assignments
- a standing command cell, headed by an American officer
- counterterrorism focus
- selectivity with the aim of effectiveness.

Each non-U.S. member contributing to the inner core would provide no more than 50 personnel—roughly an assault-team equivalent—during its rotation. Because standards for participation would be very high, and most allies do not have action units of sufficient size and capability for counterterrorism, only a few allies would likely participate.[6] Very limited participation might ease concerns about the sharing of sensitive knowledge. Other allies could support the NATO SOF effort by participating in the wider network of cooperation and perhaps by joining the core force as their SOF become qualified for counterterrorism missions.

Even though the inner core would consist of a minority of NATO members, the combined force could act for the Alliance as a whole, in response to a request from the North Atlantic Council (NAC).[7] There is ample precedent for this (for example, the few nuclear-capable members and the few in which intermediate-range missiles were deployed in the 1980s). By the same token, any member that does not wish to join NATO SOF at all should be satisfied not to participate in the establishment or use of the force, rather than to oppose what other allies wish to do.

Training would be multilateral and directed by the SJTF command. In addition, although SOF are not big consumers of airlift, adequate NATO airlift assets would need to be earmarked and readied for sudden and urgent missions. The whole system would be geared toward excellence, as defined above, and readiness for fast action, which is especially crucial in counterterrorism operations. The inner core would need to be ready to go within 24 hours of initial warning, upon the decision of the NAC. Once employed, NATO SOF—like national SOF—must have a high degree of operational decisionmaking authority. Micromanagement of an operation, after NAC has issued general mission guidance, would be self-defeating if not dangerous to SOF engaged in close quarters with terrorists. Rules of engagement would have to be as permissive as those under which national SOF operate.

Because of the tempo and danger involved in special operations, sharing tactical intelligence among units is integral and crucial. In combined operations with allies, tactical commanders will want to share such intelligence across national boundaries. Barriers will at best hamper and at worst endanger SOF and their missions. It is inherent in networking that whenever information is shared—whether to allies or among U.S. forces—the risks of compromise increase. However, this consideration should not interfere with the creation or use of NATO SOF capabilities. Any ally that is trusted enough to participate in a critical and sensitive special mission is surely to be trusted with information that bears on mission success. Allied SOF are hardly likely to imperil themselves by mishandling intelligence. Moreover, tactical information in fast-moving special operations is fleeting, thus it is not easily exploited by the enemy. In any case, tactical SOF commanders are in the best position to decide whether the operational risks of sharing information outweigh the benefits. Any constraints imposed on them only limit their options.

Sharing intelligence information may involve some risk that sources and methods will be compromised, but SOF typically generate their own intelligence and are able to judge whether the risk of compromise outweighs the consequences of not providing and receiving tactically critical information. Apart from the matter of sharing tactical intelligence information, the objective of NATO SOF interoperability will require some commonality of C4ISR systems and protocols, at least for communications connectivity. Like any other technology sharing, the allies will

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need to decide whether the advantages of being able to combine SOF for critical counterterrorism operations justify such sharing.

The fundamental argument for having an available core force lies in the specific nature and broad value of SOF. Such forces are almost *always* needed—no matter what the contingency—and needed *early*, often with little warning and a premium on moving and acting with great speed. Unlike the NRF and NATO high-readiness forces, SOF may well be needed in far less than the time it takes to cobble together earmarked national forces. While the United States could, technically speaking, meet the need with its own SOF, to be able to do so *with allies*, and *as an ally*, is much more advantageous, especially if overall counterterrorism capacity is increased by developing U.S. and allied SOF to common standards and making them interoperable.

Notwithstanding the virtues, the idea of committing even a modest number of SOF to NATO, which implies nonavailability for purely national action, may not appeal to members. Conceptually, there is another approach: a de facto NATO SOF capability. It begins by setting as a goal the ability of NATO to deploy within 24 hours of first warning a U.S.-allied SOF counterterrorism force of high quality, common methods, and integrated C^2. Even if participants decline to commit to release their units of the force—something that is in any case *not* called for by the Washington Treaty—all participating allies could agree to work assiduously to remove technical and procedural obstacles to that goal. They would agree to rotational co-location to permit common training and high readiness, form a SJTF with a permanent command, set and work toward high standards, and assign logistic and transport resources for deployment.

Dogged implementation of this alternative concept would lead to virtually the same practical efforts to form an inner core force as if NATO actually "owned" the force. It matters less whether members' SOF are legally bound to the Alliance than whether every step is taken to provide for effective combined operations when NATO and members individually decide to act. At the same time, commitment has merit, namely, confidence, credibility, and speed. From a U.S. standpoint, it is unlikely that a consensus of allies would want to commit SOF to a counterterrorism operation that the United States, as leader in the war with al Qaeda, would wish to avoid. By formally assigning NATO SOF to missions that U.S. SOF would most likely support or perhaps carry out, the United States and NATO both can increase available SOF capacity as well as their access to it. On balance, the concept of formal commitment is better than that of practical commitment, though the latter is well worth gaining.

Whichever of these two concepts is chosen for inner-core SOF, one of the most important contributions of NATO, based on its proven strengths, is to provide the organizational and logistic infrastructure needed to prepare for and mount effective combined operations. While the United States has substantial infrastructure for its own SOF, many allies do not, at least not for large or simultaneous demands. Of course, allies could make use of U.S. infrastructure, whether or not NATO has a SOF capability. But it is better for both the United States and allies if NATO can furnish and coordinate common support from a number of allies, including the United States. While each participating country could cover the expense of its rotating team, NATO should use common funds to pay for support, the cost of which would be modest because SOF require comparatively little infrastructure and service.

Wider Network

Surrounding this inner core would be a wider but much looser cooperative network of SOF from all allies committed to developing NATO SOF. In addition to counterterrorism and hostage rescue, this wider group could be enhanced through such cooperation to perform a fuller range of missions, including internal defense, counterinsurgency, intelligence gathering, peacetime advising of new partners, civil affairs, and information operations. The SOF assets of this outer network need not be co-located, but they would interact episodically and train to the same standards as the inner core.

Because this larger group would train with similar tactics and methods, it could be requested and assigned for employment by NATO in the same manner as other national forces. This would allow for augmentation of NATO's core SOF, in the event of large-scale or simultaneous demands. A successful program of cooperation would also give the Alliance the option to grow the inner core over time.

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NATO members with more advanced SOF would have a responsibility to provide personnel in small numbers to help develop SOF in the wider program. Thus, even in the outer network, it would be necessary for U.S. and other advanced SOF to share some knowledge on tactics, methods, and threats, though the need for security would be much greater in the core than in the network. While each member, including the United States, would have to decide for itself what and what not to share, the advantages of elevating SOF capabilities among committed and trustworthy allies cannot be ignored. After all, if these allies are prepared to have their SOF fight shoulder to

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Director

shoulder with U.S. SOF, the benefits of sharing could outweigh any risks, up to a point.

Such a two-part SOF offers the promise to add significantly—even dramatically, for such a small enterprise—to NATO's inventory of usable capabilities. The benefits lie in pooling, sharing, and expanding the circle of high-performance SOF. The cost of a headquarters, training facilities, and other infrastructure would be much less than the NRF. Very quickly, NATO could have high-quality SOF that could operate independently or work with NRF and other Alliance forces, and the number would grow. NATO's ability to handle critical situations and threats, including al Qaeda, would be greatly enhanced.

the United States should initiate discussions with the NATO Secretary General, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, and allies with significant SOF regarding the proposed NATO SOF

In addition to giving NATO an important new capability, the proposal offered here would give members improved options for combined coalition-of-the-willing SOF action. SOF of any of the inner core members, and perhaps of some of the outer network participants, would be able to operate with U.S. SOF or on their own, but with greater effectiveness in the fight against terrorism. In sum, NATO SOF would increase the special operations capabilities of both the Alliance and allies.

Conclusion

As soon as it is prepared, the United States should initiate discussions with the NATO Secretary General, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, and allies with significant SOF regarding the proposed objectives and two-tier architecture of NATO SOF. Even two or three nations (for example, the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany) could begin by developing plans for the inner-core force, with others joining in time. The United States and others might be more comfortable with a very tight inner core at first.

One of the first steps following a political decision to create a NATO SOF capability would be to create the standing joint task force and assign a commander and multilateral staff. Once that is done, this new cell can be expected to come up with specific plans and proposals for Alliance and members' consideration. The creation of the SJTF would signal NATO's determination both to focus and build a capability that is indispensable in defending the Alliance against terrorism.

A good test of the value of such an initiative is whether it would worry al Qaeda. It should. Terrorists in Afghanistan have witnessed first-hand what U.S. and allied SOF can do. To them, the prospect of a high-performance NATO counterterrorism force, able to operate anywhere with speed, agility, and lethality, displaying Western-democratic resolve and unity, would be highly unwelcome.

Notes

[1] By *NATO SOF* we mean allied special military and paramilitary forces, commandos, rangers, and the like that have at least some missions and capabilities like those of U.S. SOF.

[2] The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America: A Strategy for Today; A Vision for Tomorrow*, 2004, available at <www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2005/d20050318nms.pdf>.

[3] U.S. Special Operations Command Mission, available at <http://www.socom.mil/Docs/Command_Mission-060214.pdf>. See "Vision Statement" in the U.S. Special Operations Command Vision 2004, available at <http://www.socom.mil/Docs/Command_Vision-060214.pdf>.

[4] An important detail is where in NATO such a SJTF would be situated. One possibility is the standing joint headquarters in Lisbon, from which a sea-based JTF can be built and deployed.

[5] Whether allies provide companies or platoons to form such assault teams is a detail to be worked out. The key principles are that the numbers are not excessive and that units of action should be national.

[6] Participation in high-performance paramilitary (non-DOD) counterterrorism forces should not be excluded.

[7] Per the Washington Treaty, NAC consensus is required for NATO action, and any country may decline to provide troops, even if assigned to NATO.