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14. ABSTRACT Little emphasis has been placed on Naval aviation's support of Special Operations Forces (SOF), although recent operations in the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) areas of responsibility have proven the genuine requirement for a credible Special Operations capability within Naval helicopter communities. SOF personnel are routinely supported by conventional Naval helicopter assets; however no formal joint instructions or common standard operating procedures exist between U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the U.S. Navy. This undoubtedly, has opened the door for USSOCOM queries into issues of credibility, standardization, and safety. This paper will explore the historic bond between SOF and Naval aviation, describe inadequacies in joint training, and expose philosophical roadblocks and misconceptions regarding Naval aviation's Special Operations capabilities. Establishment of a Memorandum of Agreement between USSOCOM and the Chief of Naval Operations will standardize techniques, tactics, and procedures (TTPs) and enable legitimate use of conventional helicopter assets to facilitate SOF training and limited operational missions in support of Operational Commander time-critical mission requirements. Achievement of Special Operations Capable designation prior to deployment will legitimize Naval unit capabilities in the joint environment, and restructuring the JAAAC process will dramatically improve SOF training deficiencies. Implementation of these recommendations will dramatically improve the operational effectiveness and efficiency of SOF operations while ensuring a smooth transition to a true joint SOF capability.					
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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, RI**

NAVAL HELICOPTERS AND SOF: HOW JOINT ARE WE?

By

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

14 February 2005

ABSTRACT

Little emphasis has been placed on Naval aviation's support of Special Operations Forces (SOF), although recent operations in the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) areas of responsibility have proven the genuine requirement for a credible Special Operations capability within Naval helicopter communities. SOF personnel are routinely supported by conventional Naval helicopter assets; however no formal joint instructions or common standard operating procedures exist between U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the U.S. Navy. This undoubtedly, has opened the door for USSOCOM queries into issues of credibility, standardization, and safety.

This paper will explore the historic bond between SOF and Naval aviation, describe inadequacies in joint training, and expose philosophical roadblocks and misconceptions regarding Naval aviation's Special Operations capabilities.

Establishment of a Memorandum of Agreement between USSOCOM and the Chief of Naval Operations will standardize techniques, tactics, and procedures (TTPs) and enable legitimate use of conventional helicopter assets to facilitate SOF training and limited operational missions in support of Operational Commander time-critical mission requirements. Achievement of Special Operations Capable designation prior to deployment will legitimize Naval unit capabilities in the joint environment, and restructuring the JAAAC process will dramatically improve SOF training deficiencies. Implementation of these recommendations will dramatically improve the operational effectiveness and efficiency of SOF operations while ensuring a smooth transition to a true joint SOF capability.

INTRODUCTION

If events of recent history echo into the future, terrorist attacks directed at the United States, our allies, or our national interests around the globe will be an all too familiar scene. Throughout history, military leadership has superbly prepared our forces for traditional battles; those planned and fought on the plains of Europe or upon the high seas. However, political and military posture is shifting towards the aim of defending against and defeating an adversary that doesn't conform to conventional mindsets or traditional *modus operandi*; we must now focus our efforts elsewhere.

Tomorrow's conflicts will require the joint force to operate in the littorals, that region close to hostile shores where air, land, and sea forces blend, challenging the tactics, techniques, and technology of today's military. To win in the littorals, technology will give us an advantage, but alone it will fail. It will take the efforts of a team of military professionals, operating jointly, to overcome the adversary, whether traditional or asymmetric in nature.

The littoral challenges presented to the Commander in the areas of Undersea Warfare, Surface Warfare, Air Warfare, and Mine Warfare are well documented; however, little emphasis has been placed on Naval aviation's support of Special Operations Forces (SOF). This paper will explore the historic bond between SOF and Naval aviation, describe inadequacies in joint training, and expose philosophical roadblocks and misconceptions regarding Naval aviation's Special Operations capabilities. Some of the above have successfully thwarted progress toward establishment of a credible Naval joint special operations aviation capability, a capability required to shape future littoral battle space.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Just hours prior to the opening shots of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Navy Sea-Air-Land (SEALs) units, Coalition Special Forces, a Helicopter Assault Force (HAF) comprised of six Navy helicopters from five different squadrons, and Boat Assault Force (BAF) commanders gathered in the operations tent and awaited orders to seize control of two vital gas/oil platforms in the northern Arabian Gulf. Once in receipt of the order, Navy Helicopter Anti-Submarine Light (HSL) and Helicopter Anti-Submarine (HS) aircrews served sniper/C2 and medical evacuation roles in direct support of this Joint Force Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC) mission. Following the successful capture and securing of the Mina al Bakar and Khor al Amava oil platforms, Navy helicopters and SOF pushed further north to patrol the Khor Abd Allah waterway, successfully opening the port of Umm Qasr to the arrival of humanitarian aid.¹

Commodore Bob Harward, Commander Naval Special Warfare Task Group ONE lauded the support of Navy helicopters during Operation Iraqi Freedom in a personal Bravo Zulu. Commodore Harward wrote:

Not since the days of Vietnam have the Navy SEALs been afforded the opportunity to work this closely with their Naval rotary-wing counterparts during wartime. You have written a new page, not only for Naval aviation but for Naval history as well.²

During the Vietnam War, the strong bond between SEALs and Navy helicopter aircrews grew out of necessity. In early 1966, U.S. Army helicopter aircrews, operating from Navy ships, supported the SEALs in the Mekong Delta where they were plagued by deficiencies in training and skill level. Due to difficulty adapting to shipboard operations, around the clock, and night/all weather operations, a replacement for the

¹ John Zerr, "Navy Helos Should Support SEALs," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings (September 2004): 72.

² NSWTC CENT message 211028Z March 2003.

Army aviators was soon desired.³ Naval aviators proved to have the skills necessary to work in this environment and were soon ordered to begin training in helicopter gunship tactics and aerial gunnery. Shortly thereafter, the first Navy Special Operations squadron began to form. In July 1966, four detachments from Helicopter Combat Support Squadron ONE (HC-1) began transitioning to their new mission. With only one month of training alongside their Army counterparts, the Navy relieved the Army of their Special Operations support role.⁴ Flying Army UH-1B Hueys, the four detachments of HC-1 were commissioned as Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron THREE in April 1967 and continued to refine their tactics in aerial gunnery and insertion/extraction methods until their disestablishment in March 1972.⁵

Nearly two decades later, the Navy commissioned Helicopter Combat Support Special Squadrons FOUR and FIVE (HCS-4, HCS-5) in 1989 and 1988 respectively.⁶ Both squadrons were formed out of the mold created by Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron THREE in 1967. Today, these two reserve units remain the only Navy squadrons dedicated solely to SOF and Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) support.⁷ Together, these squadrons provide Naval Special Warfare (NSW) units with approximately 50% of their Inter-Deployment Readiness Cycle (IDRC) air requirements and routinely support Joint Training Exercises throughout the United States and around the globe.⁸

³ "U.S. Navy-Helicopter Attack (light) Squadron Three." 27 March 2004. <http://www.airwarvietnam.com/ha13.htm/> [23 November 2004], 1.

⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Allen F. Cantrell, "What's In The Future? Navy Helicopter Combat Support Special Squadrons." March – April 2003. <<http://www.findarticles.com.htm/>> [23 November 2004], 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 2.

Prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, the futures of HCS-4 and HCS-5 were undecided, however, it was widely acknowledged in naval circles that both squadrons were soon to be systematically dismantled and certain decommissioning loomed in the not so distant future. Today, discussions concerning the future of these squadrons have been set aside due to their significant contributions throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom. They remain the only Naval aviation assets assigned ashore in Iraq in support of joint SOF operations.⁹

Not since the spring of 1972 has the active component of the U.S. Navy had a squadron solely dedicated to the support of SOF. However, since the end of Operation Desert Storm, conventional active duty Navy helicopter squadrons have supported numerous Special Operations missions around the world.

The most widely recognized Navy/SOF missions are in support of Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) in the Arabian Gulf. These operations have been ongoing since the end of the first Gulf War. Navy helicopters have also supported the fight against the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). In 2002, both the USS KITTY HAWK (CV 63) and USS CONSTELLATION (CV 64) Carrier Strike Groups were tasked to track and, if necessary, search and seize the North Korean Motor Vessel SO SAN with her suspected cargo of WMD enroute to Yemen.¹⁰ Two HH-60H helicopters from USS CONSTELLATION (CV 64) were cross-decked to a battle group cruiser and SEALs were identified to support the takedown in the vicinity of international straits. Motor Vessel SO SAN was eventually intercepted and boarded by coalition special forces.

⁹ Mark Fitzgerald, "Naval Aviation Under the Radar." The Hook Magazine. Summer 2004 Issue. <<http://www.tailhook.org/hookmag.htm>> [23 November 2004].

¹⁰ Zerr, 72.

Special Operations Forces and Navy helicopters are engaged now in the Global War on Terrorism in the western Pacific under the direction of Commander, U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM). It is likely that Regional Combatant Commanders will rely increasingly on the SOF aviation capabilities of the Navy as the Global War on Terrorism continues to challenge the nation world wide.

TRAINING CHALLENGES

Are Special Operations Forces provided sufficient numbers of SOF helicopters to fulfill all their training requirements? Is joint helicopter training sufficiently exercised in order to develop knowledgeable, confident, and proficient joint SOF aircrews? The answer to both questions is “no.”

The Nunn-Cohen Act of 1987 established U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and united SOF from all branches of service under this single four star commander.¹¹ USSOCOM was charged with formulating joint doctrine, training the force, and identifying specialized equipment necessary to adequately support SOF.¹²

To facilitate the orderly allocation of air assets for training purposes, USSOCOM directed SOF units to submit their requests quarterly through the USSOCOM Joint Air Asset Allocation Conference (JAAAC).¹³ In theory, this is a great avenue to ensure both SOF ground elements and their supporting aviation units receive adequate training opportunities. However, due to geographical distances between SOF ground and air units, coupled with the high demand and operational tempo of SOF aviation assets around

¹¹ William C. Ohl III, “Fixing U.S. Special Operations Command – Rational Actors Not Allowed,” (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1993), 11.

¹² CRS Report for Congress, Special Operations Forces in Operation Enduring Freedom: Background and Issues for Congress (Washington, DC: 2001) 2.

¹³ Martha S. Dunne, “SEALs Need Dedicated Helo Support,” U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings (June 2001): 46.

the globe, their requested training goes largely unsupported. SOF aviation units are located throughout the United States: Army SOF units are located at Fort Bragg, N.C., Fort Lewis, WA., Fort Campbell, KY, and Fort Carson, CO.; Air Force units at Harrisburg, PA., Dothan, AL., Duke Field, FL., and Hurlburt Field, FL.; and NSW units are located at Coronado, CA. and Norfolk, VA.¹⁴ Coordinating the joint air training of all these units is extremely difficult, if not impossible. There are simply not enough aircraft to support all SOF training requirements.

Support of NSW training requirements is a significant challenge faced by USSOCOM. Insufficient numbers and geographical location of SOF aviation assets has forced the JAAAC to routinely decline support to NSW. This encumbrance to training has ultimately forced NSW to seek training opportunities elsewhere while coordinating only high priority training requirements through the JAAAC.¹⁵ For example, in April 2004, Naval Special Warfare Group ONE submitted only three aviation support requests to the JAAAC, while submitting in excess of 50 to Commander, Naval Air Forces Pacific Fleet (AIRPAC).¹⁶ As a result, the U.S. Navy provided air support for 81% of all NSW training requirements, as opposed to only 6% provided by USSOCOM SOF aviation units.¹⁷ Although NSW has found an abundant, convenient source of air support in their Navy counterparts, Navy helicopter squadrons are not currently endorsed by USSOCOM as Special Operations capable, nor is there a Memorandum of Agreement in place between the Navy and USSOCOM to standardize the training that is already underway.

¹⁴ CRS, 3-5.

¹⁵ Fry, telephone interview by author, 23 November 2004.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

This, undoubtedly, has opened the door for USSOCOM queries into issues of credibility, standardization, and safety.

NSW also requires special skill sets and aviation capabilities specific to the maritime environment. Although, Army and Air Force SOF crews have taken great strides in overcoming their lack of familiarity with operating onboard naval combatants, availability of single landing spot ships is rare, thus creating safety and proficiency concerns. The ability to safely operate onboard ship will continue to be a stumbling block to joint SOF operations until Sea Basing becomes a reality.

Insufficient joint training leads to lack of confidence, especially when units of different services are tasked to work together in a combat environment.¹⁸ The 1980 Desert One rescue mission in Iran is a good example of how inadequate training and coordination can lead to complete failure and tragedy. Participants in the operation had limited opportunity to work with one another prior to the mission and no full pre-mission rehearsal ever took place.¹⁹ The first time all components worked together was during actual execution. Doomed from the beginning, the mission dramatically ended when an H-53 helicopter taxied into a parked C-130 during a re-fueling evolution in the Iranian desert. The collision resulted in an explosion and eight Americans dead.²⁰ Richard A. Gabriel, author of *Military Incompetence*, writes:

The rescue force did not train together as a complete unit. Instead each component trained separately, at dispersed training centers, some at their home bases. Moreover, each component trained under the direction of its own commander and its own service officers, so that, in the end, none of the components was ever evaluated by officers from the other services.²¹

¹⁸ Kenneth M. Page, "U.S. Air Force Special Operations. Charting a Course for the Future." Fall 1987. <<http://airforcesoftraining.htm/>> [19 November 2004], 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁰ James H. Kyle, *The Guts to Try*. (Phoenix: Primer Publishers 1995), 295-298.

²¹ Richard A. Gabriel, *Military Incompetence*. (New York: Hill and Wang 1985), 47-50.

This incident may have easily been avoided. Had the components trained and worked together, they would have understood how each service operated and would have been familiar with differences in standard operating procedures.²² Knowledge of both would have dramatically increased the mission's opportunity for success. Fortunately, joint training exercises are more prevalent today, but limited numbers of aircraft, geographical locations, and strenuous operational tempos impede unit participation in these exercises. In spite of these obstacles, the enduring principle of modern warfare will always ring true, "Train as You Fight/Fight Like You Train."

PHILOSOPHICAL ROADBLOCKS

Our national strategy calls for the individual services to operate jointly to ensure both that we can operate successfully in all warfare areas and that we can apply our military power across the spectrum of foreseeable situations....²³

Prior to the final mission brief for the takedown of the two Iraqi oil platforms in the northern Arabian Gulf, Commander, Naval Special Warfare Task Group ONE addressed the assembled participants in the operations tent. The Commander, while in conversation with superiors back home about events that were to follow, was asked an interesting question: Why were Navy helicopters supporting the SEALs?²⁴ After telling the assembled group of this conversation, several helicopter pilots turned to one another with puzzled looks, for this question drove home the fact that ideological paradigms did exist and the extensive training conducted at the tactical unit level for over a decade went unnoticed at the operational level.

²² Page, 4.

²³ Department of the Navy, *Forward from the Sea*, (Washington, DC: 1994), 6.

²⁴ Kevin P. Lenox, "Why Did Navy Helos Cross the Beach?" *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (January 2004): 50.

Again, during a speech delivered to the staff and students of the Naval War College, misunderstandings and misconception became apparent when the speaker was asked a pointed question regarding the use of Navy helicopters in support of SOF missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was apparent that the speaker was unaware or misinformed about Naval capabilities and the extent of support currently provided by Naval assets in Iraq. However, the speaker did comment on the potential use of Naval assets in a SOF support role, but added that additional coordination and training safeguards are required before conventional Naval helicopter assets are allowed to operate alongside USSOCOM apportioned air assets. Interestingly, detachments of both HCS-4 and HCS-5 are currently forward deployed in Iraq, operating with SOF aviation assets in direct support of combat operations.²⁵ Furthermore, the professionalism and combat effectiveness displayed by both squadrons during 2nd Quarter FY-04 enabled them to singularly execute 82% of all SOF combat missions in Iraq, while other SOF aviation assets were tasked with logistical assignments.²⁶

Advocates of SOF aviation hold key positions within the USSOCOM organization and may influence decisions regarding joint interoperability. A move toward the use of conventional forces to support SOF would likely be met with extreme “push back,” especially from hard line proponents of “traditional” SOF aviation. However, during testimony delivered before the House Armed Services Committee, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command did open an avenue for further SOF/conventional force integration in light of successes experienced during Operation

²⁵ Derek Fry, Lieutenant Commander, USN, telephone interview by author 23 November 2004. (Note: LCDR Fry is a HH-60H pilot and SOF expert currently on the COMNAVSPECWARCOM staff.)

²⁶ Ibid.

Iraqi Freedom. He stated:

SOF/conventional force integration is critical....SOF and conventional forces under the command of CENTCOM were integrated at the staff level and interoperable at the tactical unit level in both planning and execution. This made SOF and the conventional forces much more effective.²⁷

The transition underway today within the armed forces toward a single joint force is both absolutely necessary and extraordinarily difficult, especially from a Naval historical perspective. Throughout Naval history, officers have operated independently at sea for extended periods of time with limited contact and direction from superiors. Thus, the Navy has legitimized its role as an independent institution and fought harder than any other service against the constraints of joint unification.²⁸ Therefore, “pushback” from Naval bureaucrats would be expected when confronted with the assignment of Naval assets to a SOF role.

Navy helicopters have been used for traditional Naval missions such as Search and Rescue, Undersea Warfare, Surface Warfare, Logistics, and Humanitarian Assistance. As the Navy solidifies its future force posture and focuses efforts toward the littorals, helicopters will play a premier role in maritime dominance and are likely to be held close by JFMCC Commanders to support these traditional Naval responsibilities. Support of SOF has not been recognized by numbered Fleet, Carrier Strike Group (CSG), and Carrier Air Group (CAG) Commanders as a “traditional” Naval mission; therefore, this capability attracts little attention and gains underwhelming support at the operational level.

²⁷ Bryan D. Brown, “Statement,” U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, The Special Operations Command Budget for Fiscal Year 2005, 108th Cong, 2nd sess., 11 March 2004.

²⁸ Carl Builder, Masks of War (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1989), 29-30.

During the 2003 National Helicopter Association flag panel discussion, leaders of Naval helicopter aviation and NSW were presented with a series of pointed questions regarding future interoperability with SOF. Helicopter Admirals stressed the importance of helicopters in direct support of the CSG and maritime superiority missions, while NSW leadership stressed the role of helicopters in support of SOF and emphasized the need for continued integration between the two communities.²⁹ The dynamic discussion that ensued brought forward the fact that even within the Navy, leaders are not in agreement on the best course of action regarding future employment of Naval assets.

As previously discussed, Navy helicopter squadrons have supported the non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and are currently supporting the Global War on Terrorism in the western Pacific and Iraq. Fortunately, for the Operational Commanders, the Navy maintained a limited Special Operations helicopter capability for these situations. In the absence of this capability, the commander would not have had the capability to rapidly respond to these maritime threats. SOF capable units from other services may have possibly responded, but time wasted identifying available forces and specific units qualified in day/night small deck ship landings would have certainly allowed target vessels to disappear into the heavy shipping lanes of the littorals or allow insurgents to blend into the population.

As long as Naval helicopter crews remain proficient in NSW tactics, techniques, and procedures, they will serve as a convenient and proven means to an end for the Operational Commander.

²⁹ Gabe Soltero, "Flag Panel Had a Lively Discussion of Helo Issues," Rotor Review (Spring 2003): 9.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Today's increasing threats, limited SOF assets, and intense operational tempos, limit the Operational Commander's ability to fulfill all maritime SOF requirements without Navy support. Recent operations in the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) areas of responsibility have proven the genuine requirement for a credible Special Operations capability within Navy helicopter communities. However, no formal joint instructions or common standard operating procedures exist between USSOCOM and the Navy, even though SOF personnel are routinely supported by conventional Naval helicopter assets.³⁰

The following recommendations will guide USSOCOM and the Navy toward a credible joint Special Operations capability that stresses standardization and safety throughout the SOF community while offering Combatant Commanders a legitimate joint Naval Special Operations capability.

The Navy should examine specific USSOCOM, U.S. Army, and U.S. Air Force SOF directives that describe specific tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) to which SOF operations are to be conducted. These TTPs should then be adopted by the Navy, with the concurrence of USSOCOM, and included in an approved Commander, Naval Air Forces (CNAF) syllabus maintained and administered through an appropriate and well established command such as the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center (NSAWC). Located in Fallon, Nevada, NSAWC is the center for Naval strike excellence and maintains a significant infrastructure capable of supporting detailed joint training for SOF units. Once stood up by NSAWC, this center for Naval/joint SOF excellence would maintain and develop joint TTPs in coordination with sister service centers of SOF

³⁰ Fry, telephone interview by author, 23 November 2004.

expertise and USSOCOM. Additionally, NSAWC would ensure Naval standardization and designate squadrons Special Operations capable during the Carrier Air Wing Fallon detachment conducted during the later stages of the Carrier Strike Group Inter-Deployment Readiness Cycle.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) should be established between USSOCOM and the Navy which defines responsibilities and relationships between the Chief of Naval Operations and Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command regarding Naval helicopter support of SOF. This MOA should also identify the TTPs and equipment necessary to standardize support requirements and promote safety throughout the SOF community. It should also specifically define the threat environment Naval aviation units are allowed to penetrate during assigned SOF missions. This MOA would enable USSOCOM to legitimately utilize conventional Navy helicopter assets in order to facilitate SOF training and limited operational missions in support of Operational Commander time critical mission requirements. The Navy would retain the responsibility to train and equip its aviation assets in order to satisfactorily perform the mission in accordance with USSOCOM directives.

The USSOCOM Joint Air Asset Allocation process requires significant review. Due to ongoing world-wide SOF operational commitments, insufficient numbers of SOF aircraft, and geographical separation of SOF units, NSW units are forced to seek aviation support from co-located Navy helicopter units in order to fulfill their Inter-Deployment Readiness Cycle (IDRC) requirements. Typically, NSW unit training officers coordinate training flights with Navy helicopter type wing operations officers who then coordinate these training sorties with individual squadrons within their wing. Squadron operations

officers then pick and choose among these various missions and attempt to match NSW training requirements with their own. This “network” has created a symbiotic relationship which serves to fulfill the needs of both communities; however, instead of working around the USSOCOM planning staff, a better way of doing business would be to place USSOCOM representatives on the Commander, Naval Air Forces U.S. Pacific Fleet (AIRPAC) and Commander, Naval Air Forces U.S. Atlantic Fleet (AIRLANT) staffs. NSW units could then present all training requirements to the JAAAC, instead of only high priority events, and have the AIRPAC/AIRLANT staff coordinate training requirements within their subordinate wings. This would allow the JAAAC to have more visibility on NSW training requirements, allow USSOCOM to better track the readiness of their units, and allow visibility on Naval helicopter unit proficiency and preparedness levels.

Finally, although not within the scope of this paper, Combatant Commander staffs should closely examine current Naval Special Operations aviation force structure and ensure its survivability throughout future budget cuts.³¹

³¹ It is the opinion of this author that HCS-4 and HCS-5 should not be decommissioned; they should be activated as dedicated SOF/CSAR support squadrons. These squadrons currently provide the majority of the NSW training during the IDRC and are the only Navy squadrons permanently based ashore in Iraq in support of SOF. The men and women of these units are understandably proud, dedicated, highly skilled, and knowledgeable CSAR/SOF professionals. The loss of this Naval capability along with the loss of experience and expertise would significantly degrade the Navy’s ability to train and support NSW forces during peacetime and appreciably reduce viable SOF options for the Combatant Commander during crisis situations.

CONCLUSION

Interoperability between conventional Naval helicopter assets and Special Operations Forces is a genuine requirement for the Operational Commander. History has demonstrated the Navy's support for the joint SOF mission; however, there have been shortcomings. These shortcomings include service misconceptions, Naval ideological paradigms, and lack of joint TTPs. Establishment of a Memorandum of Agreement between USSOCOM and the Chief of Naval Operations will standardize TTPs and enable legitimate utilization of conventional helicopter assets to execute SOF training and limited operational missions; achievement of Special Operations Capable designation prior to deployment will legitimize Naval unit capabilities in the joint environment; and restructuring the JAAAC process will dramatically improve SOF training deficiencies. Implementation of these recommendations will improve the operational effectiveness and efficiency of SOF operations while ensuring a smooth transition to a true joint SOF capability.

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