



55th Signal Company (Jeremiah Johnson)

U.S. Special Operations Command and the **War on Terror**

By DELL L. DAILEY and JEFFREY G. WEBB

On October 19, 2001, U.S. Special Operators were the first forces to bring the war on terror to the enemy in his own back yard as Operation *Enduring Freedom* began in earnest. Special Operations Forces (SOF) conducted parachute operations, helicopter infiltrations, unconventional warfare, and direct action missions just as they have during combat and training for the last 40 years. Formed around the nucleus of the 5th Special Forces Group, small numbers of Special Operators, along with allied special forces and the Central Intelligence Agency, executed a classic unconventional warfare campaign

using advanced technology combined with the tried and true methods of organizing indigenous forces (the Northern Alliance and others) to rapidly rout the Taliban and free the people of Afghanistan from their brutal rule. In the next phase of the war on terror, Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, Special Operations Forces were again first on the ground. Responsible for multiple combat fronts, they fixed the location of Iraqi army divisions while conventional forces made their drive from the south. These initial operations sent a strong message that terrorism and its sponsorship will draw a significant response.

Since 9/11, Iraq and Afghanistan have been the most visible battlegrounds in the war on terror. However, Special Operators have been heavily engaged in less publicized ventures. In the Philippines and the Pacific Rim, they are working closely with and training partner nations' forces to track, locate, and neutralize the terrorist threats within their borders. In the tri-border region of South America (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay), they are helping bring law and order to an area long known for its illicit activities and now associated with terrorist organizations. In the Pan-Sahel region of Africa, Special Operators, along with conventional forces, are training and assisting new partner nations in developing capabilities to deny terrorists freedom of movement and a new sanctuary.

This fight is global, and Special Operators are leading the way in every engagement

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they undertake. Utilizing their unique training, skills, and cultural awareness, they are doing what they do best: developing links within the population that will provide ongoing intelligence and personal relationships that will cement ties with allies around the world. With such capabilities and a global

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perspective, Special Operators will have an enduring role in defeating terrorism.

The War on Terror

America's vision of who its enemies are has evolved since September 11, 2001. Much like 65 years ago, a surprise attack has awakened the Nation to the grim realities of a threat intent on establishing a new world order that denies basic rights and individual liberty for the sake of narrowly interpreted ideology. Terrorism, once viewed as a largely criminal threat best dealt with through nonmilitary means, has now become the primary focus of our national security efforts. Terrorist groups are no longer simply law enforcement problems; rather, they are enemies of free people everywhere.

The challenge requires the mobilization of a collective will and resources, including all elements of national power, as well as the concerted efforts of allies and the private sector. Many of the actions the U.S. Government must take in this war will occur outside of designated combat zones, requiring unprecedented cooperation among departments. A synchronized national plan that applies all the capabilities of the Nation and its coalition partners is needed more than ever. The military element of national power will be just one of many.

This effort requires organizations capable of coordinating the efforts of all these diverse groups. Much like the newly established National Counterterrorism Center, designed at the national level to integrate and synchronize the U.S. Government-wide effort, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is structuring and posturing to lead Department of Defense (DOD) efforts in the war on terror. In so

doing, USSOCOM will expand and elevate its demonstrated tactical and operational prowess to the strategic level.

Establishing Focus

DOD has been fighting the war on terror for over 4 years. The operational and structural changes undertaken to fight a lethal and agile enemy have been significant, nowhere more than in USSOCOM.

Continuing the strategic transformation that created Special Operations Command, the Secretary of Defense has granted the command new authorities to prosecute the war on terror. Known for speed of action, agility, and flexibility, the command has been designated as the supported combatant command for planning, synchronizing, and, when directed, executing campaigns against terrorist organizations. Inherent in these authorities are five major responsibilities: synchronizing DOD efforts toward a common strategic endstate; establishing priorities for action and intelligence; directing global operational preparation of the environment to find, fix, and capture key terrorist leaders or facilitators; supporting the combatant commanders in their regional efforts to defeat terrorist organizations; and finally, as directed, exercising command and control of counterterrorism operations.

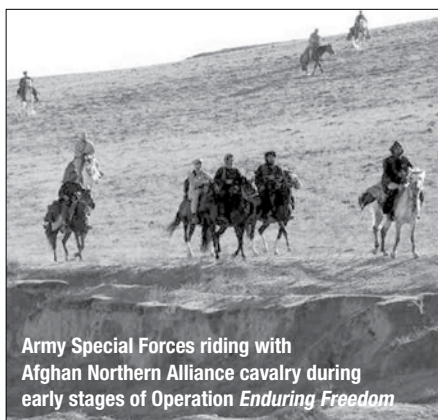
USSOCOM reorganized its headquarters to meet the increased scope of responsibility and sponsored numerous forums for DOD organizations, other government agencies, and partners to collaborate in the development and execution of global efforts to defeat terrorism. The Center for Special Operations (CSO) was created to serve as the nerve center for intelligence, operations, and plans to carry out USSOCOM's new warfighting responsibilities. The center includes the traditional J-2, J-3, and J-5

directorates functionally organized to plan and execute global operations in support of the war on terror. Recognizing the need for integrated U.S. Government and coalition coordination, CSO broadened its organization to include allies and other members of the interagency as full partners. USSOCOM developed a Collaborative Planning Environment (CPE) that provides the processes and technical tools to synchronize plans and operations rapidly among the combatant commands, DOD agencies, other government agencies, and partner nations. Additionally, Special Operations Command has led a series of annual SOF deployment conferences to prioritize utilization of limited assets, global targeting conferences to focus planning and intelligence collection, and time-sensitive planning exercises to rehearse rapid planning and execution processes. The effect has been to create the cooperative architecture necessary to establish and maintain the desired endstate: an environment inhospitable to terrorism. To achieve this goal, a common understanding is needed of how terrorism works and how we can operate against its organizations.

Understanding the Enemy

Key to winning the campaign is the ability to understand the enemy. The terrorist threat must be defined broadly, to include the known organizations of today, those who support them, and the potential organizations of tomorrow. Efforts are not solely oriented against the primary threat—the al Qaeda network. We seek to disable or dismantle all organizations that use terror to achieve their objectives.

Transnational terrorist networks with the capability and intent to do harm pose the single greatest threat to American peace and prosperity. Organizations such as al Qaeda have established a worldwide network of operators, supporters, and leaders, with links to other terrorist organizations, state sponsors, criminal enterprises, and organizations willing to provide mutual support. These networks are self-organizing; dispersed; composed of formal, informal, kinship, and cultural associations; and tied by varied and sometimes transparent links. They exploit the vulnerabilities inherent in a free and democratic society. They find safe haven by taking advantage of seams in Western policies and infrastructure. These groups understand and exploit the ease and speed of communications, financial transfers, and intercontinental movement of people to



Army Special Forces riding with
Afghan Northern Alliance cavalry during
early stages of Operation Enduring Freedom

enable their global reach. Cumulatively, they pose significant military and foreign policy challenges because they have both the intent and capability to inflict mass casualties and generate global effects.

As with past foes, current foes have exploitable vulnerabilities. The enemy is not monolithic. The groups that comprise it do not share a common endstate. They do not have an endless pool of support; it is limited and it is drying up. They cannot move around the globe undetected as before; they leave trails and we can track them. They have used advances in global technology, but we are continuing to disrupt and exploit their ability to communicate internally. Their power to motivate new adherents is limited to their ability to control the distribution of information among the vulnerable populations within which they live. That ability is slowly, yet visibly, eroding. They have been routed in many engagements and will continue to lose every time they stand up and fight. As we continue to operate against them, our understanding grows. As our understanding grows, their vulnerabilities become more apparent and exploitable.

The dynamic and global nature of the terrorist threat requires continuous reassessment and evaluation to stay ahead of the enemy. Most importantly, we must understand how these organizations emerge, operate, and sustain themselves.

We can postulate a model to simplify the complex problem of how and why terrorist organizations are able to accomplish these imperatives. Organizations that use terror operate in a cycle of four critical components: a local populace from which to draw support;

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the tacit or active support of a sympathetic or apathetic public; local and regional terrorist acts perpetrated as a result of states unwilling or unable to counter terrorism; and terror that results from global network links built on popular support and the inability of states to control local and regional terrorist networks. It is the combination of global network links and the ability to generate global effects utilizing weapons of mass

Special Forces Soldier providing security in Afghanistan near Pakistan border



destruction (or mass effect) that poses the greatest strategic threat and must remain our highest priority.

Each component of the counterclockwise cycle is dependent on the others. Terrorists develop active support for a given cause by espousing a message or ideology that resonates with a targeted populace. Tacit support results from some combination of fear and apathy among those not inclined to believe their message. As a popular support base develops, terrorists expand their freedom of action locally or regionally within states that either cannot or will not enforce the rule of law. Unwilling or incapable states are vulnerable to becoming havens for terrorist organizations and provide operational freedom of action. The establishment of global network links through a combination of safe haven and operational freedom of action permits terrorists to achieve global reach and project power. Finally, the cycle is completed when successful terrorist operations reinforce ideological justification and influence that portion of the populace that is susceptible to the extremist ideology—bringing new recruits and resources to the cause. It is against this model that USSOCOM has structured its campaign strategy.

Strategy Implementation

The endstate the United States seeks, an environment inhospitable to terrorism,

requires an innovative, adaptive strategy that addresses the entire cycle of terrorism. It calls for the full cooperation of the international community and the entire U.S. Government. All involved must subscribe to four guiding principles: preventing the emergence of new terrorist threats, isolating threats that have emerged from their support base, defeating isolated threats, and preventing the reemergence of threats already defeated.

Prevent the emergence. First, DOD must conduct operations in support of the larger U.S. Government-led effort to prevent the emergence of new terrorist threats against the United States and its interests. Done properly, these actions will minimize combat engagements. Our goal is to make local conditions untenable for terrorists through focused engagement with like-minded nations to address the conditions that allow terrorism to emerge. These efforts enable populations misinformed by censorship or other impediments to hear the truth, which is our most valuable tool. By directing our initiatives against terrorist-supporting nations and disenfranchised populations, we can reach the recruiting base before individuals become terrorists.

Isolate the threat. When a threat emerges, DOD will act decisively as part of the overall U.S. Government and international effort to isolate it, seizing the initiative by targeting the critical network links that enable terrorists to project power and influence. The goal is to reduce scope, reach, and

capabilities from a global to a regional and eventually a local level, making them subject to defeat in detail over time. These actions must be precisely selected and executed to prevent galvanizing support for the enemy.

Defeat the threat. While working to isolate a specific threat, we will simultaneously take action to defeat it by enabling and working with our partners to conduct decisive operations. We will work to increase allies' capacity for unilateral action on their own soil and to persuade

Our highest priority is to generate near-term effects that prevent or deter the enemy from attacking the United States and its allies and interests. DOD, the rest of the inter-agency community, and key international partners must take concerted actions, both offensive and defensive, designed to accomplish three interrelated objectives. First, we must prevent terrorist organizations from obtaining the resources and access necessary to conduct attacks. These actions must be oriented on the network infrastructure and

we must disrupt the ability of terrorist organizations to operate effectively over the long term by attacking their resource bases

or compel unwilling states to accept their sovereign responsibilities to deny sponsorship, support, and sanctuary. We must continually target terrorists wherever they make themselves vulnerable, keeping them dispersed, disrupted, and on the run.

The scope is much broader than application of military force alone. By developing a global team to defeat a global problem, we provide time for other nations to engage, for intelligence agencies to develop a further understanding of terrorists and their networks, and for constant pressure from all directions to have a cumulative effect on the enemy.

Prevent reemergence. Once the threat is defeated, our efforts turn to maintaining a global environment that prevents the reemergence of the threat. This environment will require cooperative efforts of all departments of the U.S. Government and coalition partners. It calls for a global Blue Force network with the ability to coordinate and support worldwide, regional, and local efforts to fight terrorist organizations down to the lowest level.

Near- and Long-Term Effects

Vital to executing this strategy is applying sustained global pressure across the enemy's depth and breadth by imposing unsolvable dilemmas on leaders at every level. To impose such dilemmas, the strategy must address the requirement to generate both near- and long-term effects on the enemy and the environment in which he fights. Near- and long-term effects must be undertaken simultaneously even though it may take years to achieve results.

leadership that provide the enemy global access and connectivity by targeting the critical resources and capabilities needed to plan, resource, and execute attacks. The goal is to deny enemies the ability to acquire, develop, or use weapons of mass destruction. Next, we must disrupt the ability of terrorist organizations to operate effectively over the long term by attacking their resource bases. We must remove their ability not only to execute operations now, but also to generate additional support and sustain themselves. Third, we must maintain global pressure on the enemy to allow other efforts to mature sufficiently and erode the base of physical, cultural, and ideological support.

To succeed over the long term, we must generate enduring effects on the enemy system that deny the sources of power that enable the enemy to sustain efforts. The defeat of organizations that use terrorism to pursue their aims will become a reality only when our international partners are capable of conducting sustained operations within their borders. Our partners have the cultural and historical understanding that working with American technology, intelligence, and training will allow them to execute operations to defeat and prevent terrorism on their own soil.

Terrorists rely on freedom of action largely defined by their ability to garner active and tacit support from the population in which they live and the states from which they operate. Over the long term, DOD must undertake operations designed to deny or restrict the enemy's freedom of action, whether physical or virtual.

We must erode the attraction of the ideology that inspires our most dangerous enemies and address the underlying conditions that often allow these ideologies to prosper. Ideology influences popular sentiment that causes people to join the movement or provide support. It bolsters the worldview that accepts terrorism as legitimate, even obligatory. It is the glue that binds the various organizations in loose coalition and enables coordination. There are underlying conditions in many societies that allow the promises of terrorists to gain traction within a vulnerable population through violence. Both of these aspects of the enemy's ability to sustain efforts must be confronted by every tool available so the populations from which they garner support are less subject to subversion. The purpose of these actions must be to isolate terrorist organizations from the populations that provide them freedom of action and resources. The erosion of the attractiveness of extremist ideologies to the vulnerable populations around the globe is the effect that will ultimately ensure that we prevail.

The war on terror will take many years. It will require patience, persistence, and a comprehensive approach. Military means alone will not be sufficient. Instead, the war will call for the concerted efforts of the entire interagency, international partners, and private sector. The public perspective should be that this is a national rather than a purely military problem, and the world should see this war as an international rather than an American crisis.

Today, U.S. Special Operations Forces and our allies deployed in the Horn of Africa use a Swahili phrase to capture the nature of their operation: *Hara 'mbee*—“all pull together” or “all help out.” It was a rallying cry to bring Kenya together when it achieved independence, and it represents what it will take to win this war. **JFQ**

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