

SOF IN UNLIT SPACES:
UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD'S DARK SPOTS IN
THE CONTEXT OF SOF OPERATIONAL PLANNING

A Monograph

by

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ABSTRACT

SOF IN UNLIT SPACES: UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD'S DARK SPOTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SOF OPERATIONAL PLANNING, by Major Joseph A. Royo, 60 pages.

In 2011, the former commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), Admiral Eric T. Olson highlighted a strategic focus for Special Operations Forces (SOF). He discussed placing greater emphasis on the "unlit spaces" around the globe to, "deal with the emerging threats from the places where the lights aren't." Relatively little literature exists discussing unlit spaces. This monograph attempts to clarify the concept of unlit spaces as an umbrella term for a multitude of potential political areas of interest using the context of categories of unlit spaces. The question of an unlit space is a question of what characteristics make a space fall under this categorization. Factors highlighting the governing structure in relation to the darkness of an area are particularly important for SOF operational planning because the sensitivity of SOF operations is proportional to the extent with which the United States decides to take intrusive actions into a region. This is especially true with regard to SOF missions that take place within the human domain. It is the human domain that makes an unlit space unique and distinct, and it is the human domain that creates accessibility risks to SOF. This monograph will look at case examples of Afghanistan and Somalia and how their unique settings during different time periods factor into planning considerations for conducting unconventional warfare in such unlit spaces.

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ACRONYMS

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JOAC	Joint Operational Access Concept
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
SEAL	Sea, Air, Land – the Navy Special Operations Force
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
TLO	The Liaison Office
UNPROS	United Nations Political Office for Somalia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command (also SOCOM)
UW	Unconventional Warfare

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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the former commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), Admiral Eric T. Olson highlighted a strategic focus for Special Operations Forces (SOF). He discussed placing greater emphasis on the "unlit spaces" around the globe to, "deal with the emerging threats from the places where the lights aren't."¹ Admiral Olson was referring to an illuminated image of Earth viewed from space at night which depicts concentrations of city lights and zones of darkness.² While this is a partially useful description of potential problem areas, it lacks comprehensiveness and over-generalizes strategic shaping of SOF potential. USSOCOM should further define what comprises those "unlit spaces" before committing resources to them. This monograph attempts to define more clearly what the unlit spaces are and what their implication are for the use of SOF. It will also offer a more comprehensive framework with which to analyze SOF options.

When looking at unlit space, the central thesis to consider is that the SOF ability to operate in unlit spaces varies based on the unique characteristics affecting accessibility of those areas. The typology, unlit spaces, means many things. It entails various characteristics causing an area to appear dark. Those characteristics demand distinct accessibility considerations. Accessibility considerations affect the feasibility of SOF missions in those unlit spaces. SOF missions conducted in the human domain, such as unconventional warfare (UW), incur unique risks associated with the nature of the human environment. Since the nature of the human domain can vary widely even within an unlit space, SOF planners must fully understand the physical and cultural nuances of the operational environment.

¹ Parrish, Karen, *U.S. Department of Defense*, February 10, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62772> (accessed September 26, 2011), ADM Olson discussed SOF and 'unlit space' at the National Defense Industrial Association Annual Special Operations and Low-intensity Conflict Symposium.

² NASA's visible earth project images are available for free at: <http://visibleearth.nasa.gov> (accessed November 1, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This monograph will examine how certain characteristics of unlit spaces impact SOF operational planning. The primary research question this monograph seeks to understand is what unlit spaces are, and what are their implications for the use of SOF? In pursuing this question, research focused on an analysis of current SOF doctrine as well as surveying a wide range of socio-political and economic data and literature related to operational variables and operational environments.

This research is relevant for SOF operational planners for two reasons. One, discussions in academia and government affecting policy decisions and the use of SOF often point to the typologies outlined in the Framework for Unlit Spaces as potential security concerns.³ Those security concerns drive operational planning toward the use of SOF to address whichever factors relate to national security in those typecast areas. When Admiral Olson discussed unlit spaces as an area for future SOF operations, he described a common association of seemingly troubled areas that might affect national security. Two, since there is a tendency to associate broad geopolitical characteristics with potential trouble, i.e. national security, there should be some clarification regarding what specific characteristics may or may not affect SOF operational planning. The Framework for Unlit Spaces (Table 1) narrows an overarching category into more manageable characteristics related to the context in which SOF teams might actually operate.

First a typology of unlit spaces will be defined based on prevailing literature describing certain types of unlit spaces. This monograph adopts some of those typologies and adjusts others to re-define them in more useful terms relevant for SOF planning. The description of unlit spaces and associated characteristics is captured in the central analytical model for this monograph, the Framework for Unlit Spaces (Table 1). Although scholars and military practitioners describe various unlit spaces in numerous

³ President of the United States, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C., The White House, 2010. Hereafter, NSS 2010. The NSS mentions placing an emphasis on promoting democratic processes in fragile democracies and denying safe haven to al-Qaida specifically in “Yemen, Somalia, the Magreb, and the Sahel.” In testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security, a panel of professors and defense officials discussed denying safe haven to Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan. See also, Richard L. Kugler’s review of national strategy documents for more on a perspective of typologies of safe havens and security threats within national strategy documents.

definitional terms, the Framework for Unlit Spaces only captures the five dominant characterizations. This is done to preserve broad generalizations of those areas that are repeatable throughout most global environments. It is also done to identify the majority of today's eco-political environments in which SOF might operate. For instance virtual internet domains falls into a category of unlit space, but that category is not particularly useful for the scope of this monograph since planning considerations accounted for here comprise physical interactions of SOF teams and people.

Second, a connection will be made between those typologies and certain SOF capabilities impacted by unlit spaces. USSOCOM employs a wide range of SOF specialties with varying mission specific tasks. Furthermore, USSOCOM is comprised of forces from all services. SOF are joint. The Framework for Unlit Spaces accounts for most operational environments in which joint SOF may operate. This means there is a very broad lens of analysis one might consider when analyzing the impact of unlit spaces on SOF. That lens, however, is too wide for the scope of analysis considered in this monograph. For instance, the majority of unlit spaces on earth are water, such as oceans, lakes, and seas. While USSOCOM maintains a subset of forces with specialties for operating in and around water, i.e. the U.S. Navy's SEALs, the ability to access open international waters is universal. Open international waters are accessible to whomever has the resource means to access them. Moreover, a survey of relevant information related to SOF operations reveals that unlit spaces mostly affect certain types of SOF capabilities. Barring legal restrictions and political will, the United States has the capability of projecting SOF into virtually any environment, *lit or unlit*. Therefore, this monograph deliberately narrows its focus to US Army SOF conducting unconventional warfare (UW) because UW operations specifically deal with personal engagements to affect political outcomes. This monograph draws heavily on the body of scholarly work that relates political structures to progress. The classic example of this is seen in space imagery of the Korean peninsula in which a distinct line between North and South Korea visibly demonstrates development in South Korea and the lack of development in North Korea.

Finally two case examples, Afghanistan and Somalia, will demonstrate how the political environments in conjunction with the physical environments during two different time periods present

altogether different UW planning considerations. Both Afghanistan and Somalia fit into categories of unlit spaces detailed in the Framework for Unlit Spaces. These two case examples will demonstrate that categorizations such as failed and failing states do not sufficiently portray the kind of environment SOF operators may contend with when conducting special operations within them. They will also demonstrate that in spite of an overarching categorization, an area may actually simultaneously fall, at least partially, under several categorizations of unlit spaces, further complicating SOF operational art.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relatively little literature exists discussing unlit spaces. Keyword searches of open source search engines such as Google as well as academic database searches such as JSTOR and eBSCO produce only moderate results related directly to the term and derivatives of “unlit spaces.” Alternatively similar searches for failed states, fragile states, failing states, ungoverned and under-governed spaces result in numerous hits in terms of general reporting and scholarly research. These terms have extensive analyses most notably emerging in the early 1990s. Furthermore, the terms failed and fragile states are associated with a number of indices measuring the relative conditions of troubled states and their propensity for conflict. One popular and often cited index is the annual Failed States Index published by the magazine, *Foreign Policy* which bases its published data on collaborated research from the non-profit Fund for Peace.⁴

This monograph attempts to clarify the concept of unlit spaces as an umbrella term for a multitude of potential political areas of interest using the existing context of categories of unlit spaces. Definitions are derived from numerous sources; however, no single source informed specific definitions entirely. The RAND Corporation and the Central Intelligence Agency through the Political Instability Task Force provide some of the most comprehensive definitions of ungoverned and politically unstable areas respectively. Additionally they both offer comprehensive rubrics and models that demonstrate the

⁴ For more on the annual Failed States Index see the 2012 report by Foreign Policy at <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/failedstates2012> or visit the Fund for Peace at <http://fundforpeace.org/> (accessed March 10, 2013).

essence of their definitions. By proposing a framework for analysis, this monograph seeks to synthesize characteristics of unlit spaces relevant for SOF options to access them.

The question of an unlit space is a question of what makes a space unlit. One of the main academic and policy debates regarding causalities revolves around the factors that lead to various conditional typologies. These debates generally fall into two camps. One camp suggests that a state's progress is related to economic policies. Paul Collier and Daren Acemoglu are two examples of prominent economists perpetuating economic factors. The other camp suggests the form of governance affects the progress potential of a state. The Polity 4 Project, a project of the Center for Systemic Peace, is an example of an index emphasizing the system of governance as a critical determining factor for future conflict.⁵ This monograph will explore factors related to governance side of international political debate. Factors highlighting the governing structure in relation to the *unlitness* of an area are particularly important for SOF planning because the sensitivity of SOF operations is proportional to the extent with which the United States decides to take intrusive actions into a region. Furthermore, as this monograph will detail one of the purposes of SOF is to influence the system of governance in an area.

Other methods of measuring states and areas entail much greater details and information regarding available resources, social trends, neighboring states, and cultural norms. These factors are useful for gaining a greater understanding of the operational environment, but they are not as much a determinant to conduct SOF operations as they are a determinant how to conduct operations. The effect of governance in unlit spaces matters because the characteristics of those spaces present various risks to both the SOF operator and operational end states. When Army Special Forces conduct unconventional warfare, for example, the initial entry phases are often considered the most vulnerable because they pose the greatest risk to forces and to mission (Figure 1).

⁵ For more on the Center for Systemic Peace and the Polity 4 Project, see <http://www.systemicpeace.org/> (accessed January 12, 2013).

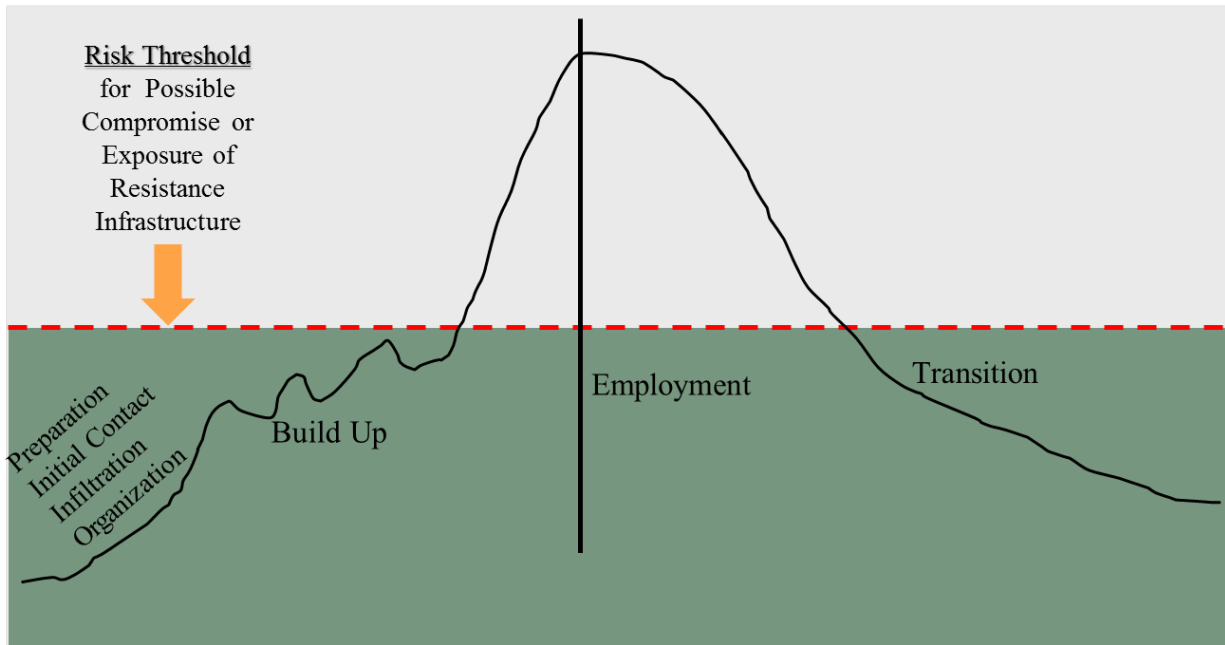


Figure 1. UW Vulnerability as Part of “Overthrow” Effort.

Source: Fundamentals of Unconventional Warfare class taught through the JFK Special Warfare Center and School⁶

An abundant amount of material are available defining special operations, from current doctrinal manuals to personal accounts of actions taken during the past decade of war. Recent personal accounts tend to glorify the fascination of special operations’ uniqueness. SOF literature prior to the Global War on Terror, however, tends to discuss the technical merits of SOF. For instance, the current USSOCOM Commander, Admiral William H. McRaven wrote a study of various SOF missions conducted since 1940. In it, he measures a vulnerable period of “relative superiority” after which SOF operations stand the greatest chance of success.⁷ He defines this vulnerable period as “a condition that exists when an

⁶ Figure 1. UW Vulnerability as Part of “Overthrow” Effort. is an example of a period of risk and the point of relative advantage during an “overthrow” UW option. It is derived from a Fundamentals of Unconventional Warfare class taught as part of an Unconventional Warfare Operational Design Course (UWODC) through the JFK Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, NC. The image is only intended to depict that a critical period exists in the initial stages of UW that present unique risks to SOF. It is not intended to portray a prescribed UW methodology because each UW scenario is unique and requires different operational approaches, as will be explained in the subsequent case studies.

⁷ McRaven, William H., *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare*, Novato: Presidio Press, 1996, 4.

attacking force, generally smaller, gains a decisive advantage over a larger or well-defended enemy.”⁸ In current U.S. Army doctrine, the idea of relative superiority relates to actions that “seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to gain and maintain a position of relative advantage.”⁹ The argument proposed here is that when SOF conduct UW in unlit spaces they seize the initiative during two critical periods. The first is upon initial entry and contact with resistance elements. The second is after early confidence building operations begin to have intended effects against a designated antagonist. Understanding the period of critical vulnerability is linked to understanding the nature of the unlit space because an unlit space is by definition dangerously void of hospitable alternatives. That is why SOF are a valuable military alternative to breach those spaces.

Since certain SOF operations, like UW, involve the human domain, the cultural context of an area factors into operational planning after a SOF operation is underway when that period of relative advantage is gained.¹⁰ Prior to that, political elements weigh heavily on whether to conduct an operation and in which form of covert and clandestine manner it is conducted. Therefore, unlit spaces, while necessarily complex in their cultural and geographical contexts, are better analytically considered with factors that make them fall under the “unlit” categorization, which in areas with people tend to lean toward the political i.e. governing determinants. The following excerpt from Tamim Ansary’s, *Destiny Disrupted*, captures how governing nuances affect the ability to conduct operations in spite of the capabilities of major powers:

But the British found that bending Afghan leaders to their will did them little good. The leaders they bent simply broke off in their hands and ended up as their dependents, not their tools, while the tribal people they were supposedly the rulers of operated in the hills as leaderless guerillas. The second Anglo-Afghan War took a nasty turn when the British envoy Cavagnari was killed and ruinous urban battles broke out; in the end the British were forced to pull back to the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Army Doctrine Publication 3-0 Unified Land Operations," Washington, D.C., Headquarters, Department of the Army, October 10, 2011, 1.

¹⁰ United States Special Operations Command, "United States Special Operations Command 2020," USSOCOM, January 2013, 1. Hereafter SOCOM 2020. The human domain is an emerging concept of SOF operations and one in which SOF are particularly suited to maneuver.

subcontinent again...In the wake of this second Anglo-Afghan war, the Russians and British decided the territory ruled by the Afghan tribes cost too much to occupy and agreed to make the whole place a buffer zone between their empires: the Russians would not come south of the Oxus River, if the British would agree not to push north of an arbitrary line in the desert drawn by British diplomat Mortimer Durand. The territory between these lines became Afghanistan.¹¹

As to what are unlit spaces and why SOF are interested in them, the discussions follow two definitional camps. The first camp seeks to clarify exactly what is an unlit space. This camp has seen the evolution of definitions to explain troubled spots and potentially predict future crises. As mentioned earlier, causal discussions attempt to link present conditions with previous policy decisions, either economic or governance. These discussions tend to result in causal and predictive matrices, such as the prominent Failed States Index.¹² The other camp seeks to understand accessibility. Accessibility relates to the ease, method, and ramifications of breaching another party's (nation, territory, zone, scope of business, etc.) claim to control. This is a far more nuanced camp as it entails activities to encroach upon sovereignty as well as security measures to counter similar encroachments. Furthermore, the nuances of this field of inquiry extend into intangible domains such as cyber and various layers of space. Additionally, international laws and prevailing *jus cogens* international relations influence the extent to which governments, businesses, and private ventures seek to gain access and counter access within accepted and legitimate norms. The Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) 2012 is one attempt to grasp the complexity of such nuanced and vital accessibility concerns.¹³

While there is a wide body of research discussing failed states and ungoverned spaces, an emerging area of research discusses the potentiality of security threats from highly governed areas. Those

¹¹ Ansary, Tamim, (2009-04-28), *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes*, Perseus Books Group, Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 4370-4373.

¹² The Fund for Peace in cooperation with Foreign Policy Magazine produce a yearly index of so-called failed states. This index has become an often cited source to indicate problem areas around the globe. For more see: <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=fsi> (accessed March 10, 2013).

¹³ Department of Defense, "Joint Operational Access Concept," Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, January 17, 2012. Hereafter JOAC 2012. The Joint Operational Access Concept 2012 categorizes nuanced areas as domains and seeks necessitate a "cross-domain synergy" of efforts to address accessibility into projected areas of interest and areas of operation.

are the mega-cities, the extremely well lit spaces. This monograph will not attempt to analyze SOF operational planning in those spaces. Instead, this monograph recognizes that not all threats emerge from areas void of governance and development. In fact, one body of research demonstrates that the U.S. has been more vulnerable to threats emerging within the United States than outside.¹⁴

Recent strategy and policy documents, such as the National Security Strategy, the National Military Strategy, and the latest Quadrennial Defense Review, indicate a growing need for specialized forces to deal with emerging uncertainties.¹⁵ Specifically, SOF are identified as the unit of choice for providing sustained, scalable, and cost-effective means to engage with unstable or undergoverned areas.¹⁶ Moreover, given that these documents note the prevalence of an uncertain future, they further indicate the need to increase the use of SOF as a responsive and flexible operational link to global strategic aims. For instance, the USSOCOM is the proponent for global missions such as countering terrorism and Security Force Assistance (SFA).¹⁷ Admiral Olson discussed the practical application of tactically employing SOF to fulfill strategic aims through the longstanding leadership of SOF in Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (CJSOTF-P).¹⁸ Specifically he addresses SOF leadership of CJSOTF-P where GPF provide direct support to SOF for activities deemed as Irregular Warfare (IW).¹⁹

¹⁴ Simcox, Robin, and Emily Dyer, *Al-Qaeda in the United States: A Complete Analysis of Terrorism Offenses (Abridged)*, London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2013, viii.

¹⁵ Kugler, Richard L., *New Directions in U.S. National Security Strategy, Defense Plans, and Diplomacy*, A Review of Official Strategic Documents, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011, 22, 25-30, 112.

¹⁶ McRaven, Admiral William H., "Testimony Before House Armed Services Committee," *U.S. House Armed Services Committee*, September 22, 2011, http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=2d29a1f6-b1f2-4ee1-808f-d51a8322bafc (accessed March 2, 2012), 4-5. Hereafter, McRaven Testimony.

¹⁷ "Special Operations," *Joint Publication 3-05*, Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 18, 2011, II-12.

¹⁸ Olson, Eric T., interview by David H. Gurney, & Jeffrey D. Smotherman, *An Interview With Eric T. Olson* Joint Force Quarterly, (2010), 60-63. ADM Olson discusses the use of SOF in relation to emerging strategy changes emphasizing the need to employ SOF in greater capacity and roles.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

One of the more compelling reasons for an emphasis on SOF to focus on aspects of IW comes from DOD Directive 3000.07 which details efforts and responsibilities for IW. Specifically, USSOCOM is chartered with developing “SOF capabilities for extending U.S. reach into denied areas and uncertain environments by operating with and through indigenous foreign forces or by conducting low visibility operations.”²⁰ Therefore, the role of SOF in unlit spaces is worth further exploration because the idea that SOF operators need to go into those spaces seems on the surface plausible, but in practice is nuanced by the particularities of a given point in space at a given point in time.

UNLIT SPACE TYPOLOGIES

What are the unlit spaces? From a merely technical perspective, they encompass the broad swath of terrestrial space on the globe that literally has little to no light when viewed from space at night. The NASA Visible Lights image shows the earth's areas of light and dark (Figure 2).²¹

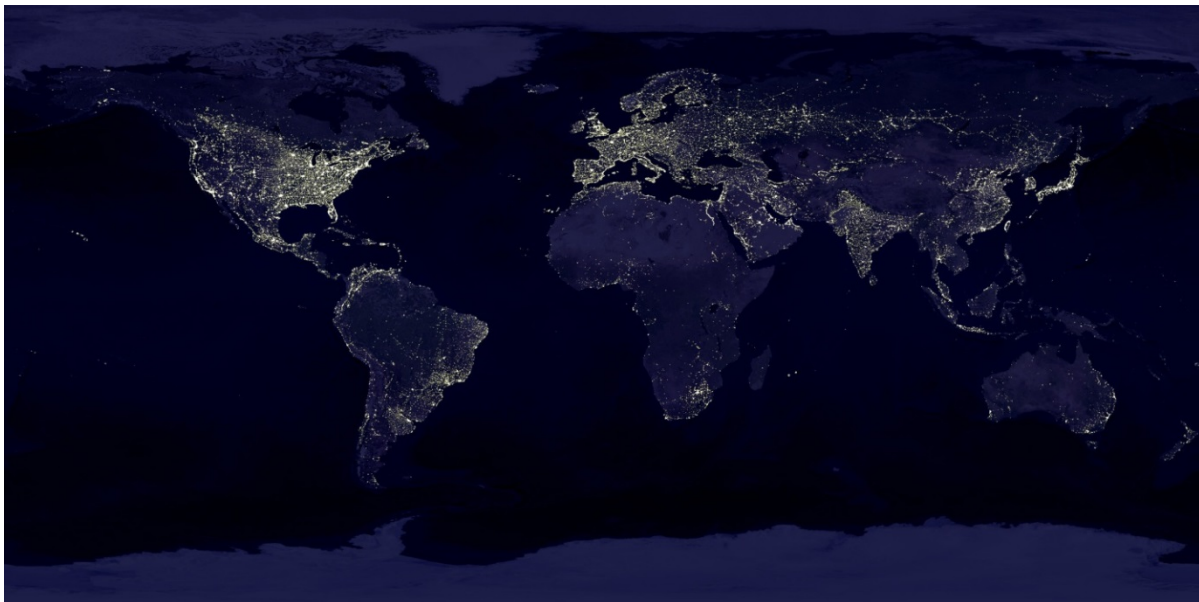


Figure 2. NASA Earthlights Visible Earth Image

Source: NASA Visible Earth Project

²⁰ Department of Defense, "Department of Defense Directive 3000.07 Irregular Warfare (IW)," Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, December 1, 2008, p. 10.

²¹ NASA's visible earth project images are available for free at: <http://visibleearth.nasa.gov> (accessed November 1, 2012).

At first glance, the implication of Admiral Olson's intention seems obvious; bring light to the darkened spaces. However, some of those spaces will be void of light for the foreseeable future. Some of those spaces are darkened for ecological reasons. Some are void of light for eco-political reasons. Moreover, some are void for reasons related to failed systems of self-determination and development. Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has placed greater attention on less developed nations. Various terms used to describe areas of concern include failed states, failing states, fragile states, ungoverned spaces, under-governed spaces, and now unlit spaces. Each connotes a unique set of conditions; therefore, each implies potentially unique sets of criteria for SOF consideration. If SOCOM intends to seek out those unlit spaces, defining what they are may help determine SOF solutions to either gain access or engage with these areas and the people who inhabit them on a persistent basis.

Unlit spaces

Unlit spaces describe generally two global characteristics: geographic regions characterized by their ecology and their condition of habitability. Geographic regions include water, arid and desert zones, dense forested and tropical jungle regions, and freezing and frozen lands. In terms of actual terrestrial space, naturally occurring dark areas make up most of Earth. Consequently, little to no human activity appears to be going on. However, those areas should not be discounted altogether. In fact, much human activity does occur in those areas. For instance the world's oceans contain the majority of trafficable lanes of commerce through which the majority of the world's consumable goods travel.²² Protecting free access to shipping lanes is a major security priority not only for the United States but for many countries engaged in international trade. Recently the Department of Defense issued new guidance redirecting the efforts of the DOD to the Western Pacific and East Asian regions.²³ Therefore the question USSOCOM

²² International Maritime Organization, "International Shipping Facts and Figures," *International Maritime Organization*, March 6, 2012, <http://www.imo.org/KnowledgeCentre/ShipsAndShippingFactsAndFigures/TheRoleandImportanceofInternationalShipping/Documents/International%20Shipping%20-%20Facts%20and%20Figures.pdf> (accessed March 20, 2012). More than 90% of global trade is carried by sea.

²³ United States Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st*

must answer is to what extent can it cover areas such as the world's waterways, and with what resources?

Similarly, unlit spaces characterize the habitability of a place. Uninhabitable areas, for obvious reasons, are generally places where people are not. They consist of regions such as the arctic poles, severely arid lands, and numerous deserted islands. Islands in particular represent a vast unlit range because they extend throughout the major oceans and seas. Their implication to USSOCOM is arguably minimal yet not insignificant. For instance, targeted SOF efforts by various SOF specialties may be used to curtail terrorist transit havens through island networks in the Philippines. What is important to understand with regard to the uninhabitable areas is that their implication for SOF application may require more targeted and coordinated approaches for very specific purposes.

The habitable areas, however, comprise a different set of characteristics requiring much broader domains of SOF and whole of government inter-organizational cooperation. Habitable areas fall into various categories discussed below. They are generally areas where people live and may be governed by some form of either state or local governing apparatus. Since there are similarities between each of the types of unlit spaces, one will find overlaps in terms of either specific examples or of general characteristics. For example North Korea is a habitable yet unlit space. Depending on how one empirically measures data, North Korea may either be considered a fragile state or a failing state. As USSOCOM attempts to address unlit spaces, they must consider what characterizes the area and to what extent the area is accessible in order to determine which resource best suits a particular unlit space. To help understand potential SOF implications the following Framework for Unlit Spaces Analysis provides an analytic tool with which to gauge a best approach (Table 1).²⁴

Century Defense, Defense Strategy, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2012, 2. Specifically the DOD intends to provide for, "The maintenance of peace, stability and the free flow of commerce, and of U.S. influence in this dynamic region..."

²⁴ The Framework for Unlit Spaces Analysis is the author's attempt to merge several contemporary academic and strategy discussions into a single tool. Although one should be cautious of trying to fit too many variables into a single model, this framework offers a basis with which to analyze so called unlit spaces and then to associate whole-of-government responses to each based on unique access and implication characteristics.

Table 1. Framework for Unlit Space

Location	Characteristic	Categories	Example	Inhabited	Governance	Accessibility
Unlit Spaces	Dark areas on earth as seen from space. Reference NASA Earthlights project.	Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oceans & Seas • Lakes • Commercial waterways 	No	None	Open
		Arid desert zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sahara region in Africa • Regions of Middle East 	Dispersed	Concentrated within major urban centers	Open with sovereign restrictions
		Jungle/Heavy Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regions of Central & South America • Regions of Southeast Asia 	Limited	Dispersed	Limited with sovereign restrictions
		Freezing/Frozen Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arctic and Antarctic regions • Tundra areas of North America • Siberian region of Asia 	No	Generally none	Limited
		Uninhabited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uninhabited islands 	No	None	Open with sovereign restrictions
		Inhabited	North Korea	Yes	Yes	Restricted
Ungoverned Spaces	Virtually no state apparatus to reach population groups and provide public goods.	Disputed territories	FATA region of Pakistan Durand Line AF-PAK border	Yes	Decentralized authorities	Limited with sovereign restrictions
		Failed States	Somalia	Yes	Incapacitated	Limited with international restrictions
Under-governed Spaces	State unable to provide public goods because of an inability to gain access to the public or incapable of providing public goods	States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing states • Sudan/South Sudan 	Yes	Limited or decentralized	Limited with sovereign restrictions
		Intra-state regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict zones within states – FATA, cartel controlled Northern Mexico • Areas of Afghanistan 			
Fragile States	States facing difficulties providing public goods		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egypt • Pakistan • Greece • Iraq 	Yes	Centralized	Limited
Failing States	States on the verge of governing collapse either from conflict or economic instability.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syria • Afghanistan • Nigeria 	Yes	Centralized and fractured	Limited with sovereign and international restrictions
Failed States	Non- functioning state apparatus to provide public goods to citizens within state.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somalia (exception of northern Somalia) • Libya 	Yes	No or not functioning	Limited with international restrictions

Source: Created by the author.

Fragile states

Fragile states are those that face difficulties providing public goods.²⁵ Public goods are common to all population groups making up a society and generally cannot be provided for any length of time by private businesses. Paul Collier suggests the two primary public goods are accountability and security.²⁶ For practical reasons societies coalesce around an apparatus - the state or governance apparatus for instance - to collectively provide security to the masses to fulfill a way of life and institute accountability to preserve the rule and order of that way of life. States that have trouble doing those two things have trouble promoting prosperity within their borders and with other international interests. Consequently, fragile states may begin to appear attractive to groups seeking to take advantage of the government's limited control. Egypt and Pakistan are two examples. Neither is necessarily non-functioning in terms of state governance. Both maintain valid interests in the international community. Both face mounting troubles providing public goods for security reasons, economic reasons, or governance reasons. Yet, both arguably are on the verge of slipping into an irrecoverable domestic mess that will require international intervention to reverse.

Approaching these states from a USSOCOM perspective requires close cooperation with other government agencies, namely the Department of State. Since fragile states enjoy a relative measure of sovereign freedom, overt intervention measures risk devaluing the credibility of established relationships. Whole of government strategies necessitate cooperative partnerships for military-to-military exchanges and training. And, given that the states enjoy a relative measure of

²⁵ The definitions of various unlit spaces are the author's attempt to clarify what the spaces are. They are not derived from a single source, rather are adapted from numerous definitions used in academic and policy discussions. Except where specifically cited, these definitions are the author's attempt to simplify them and offer a more practical definition within the construct of the author's Framework for Unlit Space. The concept of public goods however and their relationship to states is largely derived from Paul Collier's concepts in *Wars, Guns, and Votes*.

²⁶ Collier, Paul, *Wars, Guns, and Votes*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009, 229-237.

sovereign freedom, imposed intervention is a highly unlikely and more probably problematic approach. Therefore, USSOCOM might seek invitation to these states for such events as training exchanges or aid opportunities.

Failing states

Failing states are similar to fragile ones except that they have succumbed to domestic and/or international pressures. In failing states the state apparatus reaches a tipping point in which it can no longer provide some public goods. Additionally, they demonstrate no immediate signs of recovery. Unless something dramatic happens, such as a sudden altruistic regime change or a massive international intervention, the state governments will most likely crumble. Syria, is a good example today of a failing state. One might also consider Afghanistan and Nigeria to be failing states because neither demonstrates progressive growth potential without significant international support.²⁷ Furthermore, their security situation has deteriorated to the extent it strangles the potential for peace and growth. Significant deterioration is operationally problematic for Combatant Commands and others like USSOCOM because intelligence operations, specifically HUMINT type operations, may present particularly problematic solutions.²⁸ Again, without significant international support, these states would surely fail.

Accessibility to failing states depends on three factors: the extent to which the state is out of control, the international restrictions limiting interventions, and sovereign restrictions limiting

²⁷ The World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects Uncertainties and Vulnerabilities*, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2012:
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/EXTGBLPROSPECTS/0,,menuPK:615470~pagePK:64218926~piPK:64218953~theSitePK:612501,00.html>. (accessed March 1, 2013). Close to 90 % of Afghanistan's GDP is based on international aid donations, 50% of which comes from the United States. Countries such as Afghanistan require significant international aid and intervention in order to function.

²⁸ Hulnick, Arthur S., "Espionage: Does it Have a Future in the 21st Century," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2004): 165-173, 170. He talks about the need to revert back to Cold War era tradecraft or to revamp tradecraft to more creative means particularly in rogue and closed states.

intervention. Afghanistan is currently not as limited because much of the territory remains under international control. Therefore gaining access is arguably easier through existing international aid, security and development architectures. Syria, however, poses a greater accessibility problem because the state's sovereign restrictions severely limit external intervention.²⁹ International restrictions, particularly by countries with unique interests such as China and Russia, place significant international pressure on overt and covert interventions. These states can be especially tricky to do anything in because of the unstable nature of domestic and international security and politics.

Failed states

Failed states have ceased to function. They lack the capacity and domestic capability of governing and of providing public goods. Somalia is the classic example of a contemporary failed state. For several years Somalia has topped indices of failed states.³⁰ For over 20 years, Somalia has not had a functioning government.³¹ It has been ruled by anarchy and more recently by terrorist groups such as Al Shabaab. Like failing states, the failed states are similarly unstable. However, their accessibility may be more opportune depending on the kind of threat one is willing to endure relevant to the scope of strategic interest. Arguably, interventions in these states pose fewer international political problems because there is little the international community can

²⁹ Dempsey, Martin, interview by Fareed Zakaria, *Interview with Martin Dempsey on Syria, Iran and China* CNN Global Public Square, February 17, 2012, The full transcript and video is available at: <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/17/watch-gps-martin-dempsey-on-syria-iran-and-china/> (accessed March 1, 2013).

³⁰ The Fund for Peace publishes a failed states index every year for the past seven years. Somalia has ranked number for the past four consecutive years. See: <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=node/122> (accessed March 10, 2013).

³¹ Bruton, Bronwyn E., *Somalia: A New Approach*, Council Special Report No. 52, New York, N.Y.: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010. Many peer reviewed reports suggest that Somalia has not had a functioning government since the fall of Siad Barre's government in 1991. Bronwyn Bruton's Council on Foreign Relations 2010 report on Somalia is a primer for understanding the condition of anarchy throughout Somalia.

do to block intervention. Moreover, strategic interests in places such as Somalia do not challenge the international community in *toto*; interests tend to be regional or, in most cases, highly localized.³²

Operational planners should *not* presume that a lack of vital national interests correlates to a calculated lack of security interest. The U.S. learned this harsh lesson on September 11, 2001 after the United States and others largely ignored Afghanistan through the 1990s.³³ Afghanistan's failed condition led to the emergence of Taliban governance which hosted al-Qaeda's operations. Although recent experiences fighting terrorist networks encourage greater attention on failed states, and conveniently failed state indices make for attractive discussion think pieces, there is ample evidence of threats originating in very successful states. The United States, for instance, hosts a growing threat of Somali Al Shabaab terrorists.³⁴ This presents a significant legal challenge for both operational and strategic intelligence planners; they must link failed states with their diaspora hosts to observe SIGINT, and HUMINT trends.³⁵ Therefore, the challenge for operational planners working in a strategically impacting organization such as USSOCOM or other COCOMs will be to balance the potential of a threat with national and international interests.

³² Kalyvas, Stathis N., *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 391.

³³ Royo, Joseph, "Afghanistan Part II: the Reoccurrence of International Terrorism in Somalia," *Small Wars Journal*, August 30, 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/519-Royo.pdf> (accessed September 7, 2011). Hereafter, Royo, Afghanistan Part II. See also, Afghanistan in 1992: A Hobbesian State of Nature; Afghanistan in 1994: Civil War and Disintegration; Afghanistan in 1996: Year of the Taliban.

³⁴ Pantucci, Raffaello, "Australian Strategic Policy Institute," *ASPI Independent Analysis/Policy Advice*, October 13, 2009, http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication_details.aspx?ContentID=226 (accessed April 13, 2012).

³⁵ Pearce, Mark W., *The Evolution of Defense HUMINT Through Post Conflict Iraq*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2009, 3.

Ungoverned spaces

Ungoverned spaces are generally characterized by either disputed territories or failed states. The overlap between ungoverned spaces and failed states is intentional because characteristic of ungoverned spaces is a complete lack of a governing system. Again, Somalia fits this description. So too did Iraq and Afghanistan before instating a form of governance. The reason it is important to distinguish between failed and ungoverned is because the duration of un-governance may be temporary as it is with an international intervention (Iraq and Afghanistan).

The potential duration of un-governance in failed states factors into accessibility. When the state of un-governance is limited and under external international control, access falls largely on the international apparatus upholding state control. Long-standing failed states like Somalia present a different set of circumstances. The matter of accessibility is altogether different, however, in disputed territories because domestic sovereignty and international control can clash as is the case with the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

These areas might seem necessarily ripe for SOF intervention because strategic U.S. policies reinforce the singular military capability of force projection principally with respect to defeating terrorist networks.³⁶ This interesting license to interdict terrorist networks outweighs cooperative international reliance and to date has been largely unopposed. SOF, therefore, enjoys a certain measure of freedom of access for the time being. One should expect that freedom of access to diminish as international attention turns away from concentrated efforts toward other international or domestic matters.³⁷

³⁶ NSS 2010, 19-21.

³⁷ Steiner, James Dr., "Challenging the Red Line between Intelligence and Policy," *Institute for the Study of Diplomacy*, Washington D.C.: Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, 2003, 7. The singular focus on terrorism transformed the CIA in a bad way because other efforts have been under-emphasized.

Under-governed spaces

Under-governed spaces are one of the more unique areas that are "unlit." In under-governed spaces, host states either cannot provide public goods or have little to no interest in providing public goods to a region within their sovereign borders. One of the problems with gaining access to under-governed spaces is that they are often located within a state's borders. The Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) region of northwest Pakistan is one of the more illustrative examples of an under-governed space. The Pakistan government has little to no control over the fragmented populations and infrastructure throughout the FATA.³⁸ Consequently a vacuum of public governance power exists.³⁹ This poses two problems. First, access to these areas is problematic because the hostile and often lawless environments prevent legitimate overt access and significantly challenge covert access.⁴⁰ Second, despite significant militant control, these regions remain within sovereign borders and states prefer authorized cooperation when external bodies conduct operations, particularly military operations within their sovereign borders.⁴¹ Intervening either covertly or through clandestine operations may threaten insecurity between partnered nations.

When states conduct unilateral military operations into sovereign territory, they place

³⁸ Fair, C. Christine, "Time for Sober Realism: Renegotiating U.S. Relations with Pakistan," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (April 2009): 149-172. Pakistan's "black hole," the FATA region, has been virtually ceded to by central Pakistan authority.

³⁹ Armitage, Richard L., Samuel R. Berger, and Daniel S. Markey, *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Independent Task Force Report No. 65, New York City, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010, 22. The FATA has been vacuum of power because local tribal systems left over from colonial British rule have assumed a form of authority beyond what the Pakistan's governance structure reasonably could support.

⁴⁰ Johnson, Scott, "The Hunt for Africa's Last Warlord," *Newsweek*, May 16, 2009. The efforts to capture Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the African Congo region are an example of this challenge.

⁴¹ Information about the FATA and it's relation to the Pakistani governance is available at: http://fata.gov.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=84 (accessed February 1, 2013).

excess strain on diplomatic relations and may even risk ruining relations.⁴² Therefore, the use of SOF should be extremely judicious with careful consideration of political and international backlash. The consequences should be balanced against the overall importance of strategic and international interests. Arguably these areas are accessible, especially by SOF, but only at a potential cost to state relations.

Other spaces

The moniker "unlit spaces" is an over-generalization that provides a convenient illustration of potential problem areas. USSOCOM should be careful not to over-generalize a characterization of areas of concern because they may become too easily fixated on an appealing problem-set. It becomes a matter of expediency, and we therefore risk either miscalculating our resource alignment or missing a problem area altogether. The proposed attention to "unlit spaces," while seemingly necessary, may overlook an emerging area that does not fall within the scope of the aforementioned trouble zones. These areas are not "unlit." Rather, they are extremely well lit. These are the megacities such as Mexico City, Cairo, and Jakarta.⁴³ A number of potential problems arise from these massive urban centers including significant resource demands, crime, youth explosions and unemployment.⁴⁴

USSOCOM should consider whether cyber and space represent unlit spaces too, and if they have implication for SOF? The cyber realm is certainly something SOF should consider as national policies place greater emphasis on either protecting or combating cyber threats. The

⁴² Gilani, Tariq, "US-Pakistan Relations: The Way Forward," *Parameters*, Winter 2006-07: 84-102, 100. See also recent news reports regarding the outing and subsequent arrest of an alleged spy that the U.S. used to locate Usama bin Laden such as: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/47944034/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/#.T-kVHrWe7ng.

⁴³ Liotta, P.H., and James F. Miskel, "Redrawing the Map of the Future," *World Policy Journal*, Spring 2004: 15-21. Megacities are emerging areas of national security concern.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

JOAC identifies space and cyber space as two emerging areas relevant to strategic security.⁴⁵ Of interest to USSOCOM is the JOAC's assessment of SOF's role in addressing strategic access areas. The JOAC contends that:

special operations forces are valuable for locating, targeting, and destroying key enemy capabilities, as well as for cultivating indigenous resistance elements that can help disrupt the antiaccess/area-denial [sic] strategy. Like space and cyberspace forces, special operations forces likely will be in position, often operating in denied territory, in advance of the commitment of major forces to set the conditions for the employment of those forces.⁴⁶

Finally, virtual social spaces may comprise an additional space that is theoretically unlit. This realm may exist within the cyber domain; however, further research should clarify the meaning of and implication of virtual gathering places such as social media, blogs, internet sharing services, etc. For operational planners and for the purpose of USSOCOM, virtual social spaces consist of actual (virtual) locations where people gather. These locations are real because individuals participate in the social behavior of human interaction. They are virtual because those human interactions take place in a domain in which direct contact between individuals is not a prerequisite.⁴⁷ Virtual spaces may ultimately become a much greater component of future SOF planning because, as the two case studies will demonstrate, societies that disseminate information through social connectedness may use alternative technological mediums to extend their social reach instantaneously.

⁴⁵ JOAC 2012.

⁴⁶ JOAC 2012, 22.

⁴⁷ Papacharissi, Zizi, "The Virtual Geographies of Social Networks: A Comparative Analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld," *New Media & Society*, 2009: 199-220, 200. The public/private dilemma in an internet environment falls into three realms. Facebook is representative of publically open locations. LinkedIn moderates its public accessibility with access controls to further information based on subscription services. ASmallWorld.net is an example of a wholly private social space that is exclusive to invited members only.

SOF CAPABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

“SOF are inherently joint.”⁴⁸ Their mission planning originates at strategic and operational level, joint commands. SOF missions generally employ a mix of services. Additionally, the sensitive nature of most SOF missions, place SOF in direct support of strategic and theater operational objectives. Consequently SOF maintain degrees of secrecy in terms of their force structure, purpose, and mission. Since the range of SOF capabilities varies in association with their degree of secrecy and strategic purpose, this monograph deals primarily with those forces that observe slightly more openness regarding their stated purposes. Given that Army SOF comprises a large portion of the USSOCOM architecture, this monograph will tend to emphasize the role of SOF by purposefully over-weighting analysis with Army SOF options.⁴⁹

Table 2. Special Operations Activities Comparison

Special Operations Core Activities	
Direct/Surgical Strike	Indirect/Special Warfare
Direct action	Unconventional warfare (UW)
Special Reconnaissance	Foreign internal defense
Counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction	Security force assistance
Counterterrorism	Counterinsurgency
	Information operations
Military information support operations (MISO)	Military information support operations (MISO)
	Civil affairs operations

⁴⁸ JP 3-05, II-2.

⁴⁹ The purposeful over-weighting is based merely on a convenience of analysis when looking at the potential types of missions associated with accessing mostly land-based unlit spaces.

Source: created by the author.

Generally, USSOCOM employs SOF along two lines of effort. One is a direct line of effort which entails direct action, strike type missions. The other line of effort is indirect and entails partnered actions including unconventional warfare and civil affairs.⁵⁰ Army doctrine delineates the two lines of effort more specifically as, surgical strike and special warfare (Table 2).⁵¹ U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) designates specific units to perform designated special warfare and surgical strike tasks (Figure 3). Special operations core activities include the following:

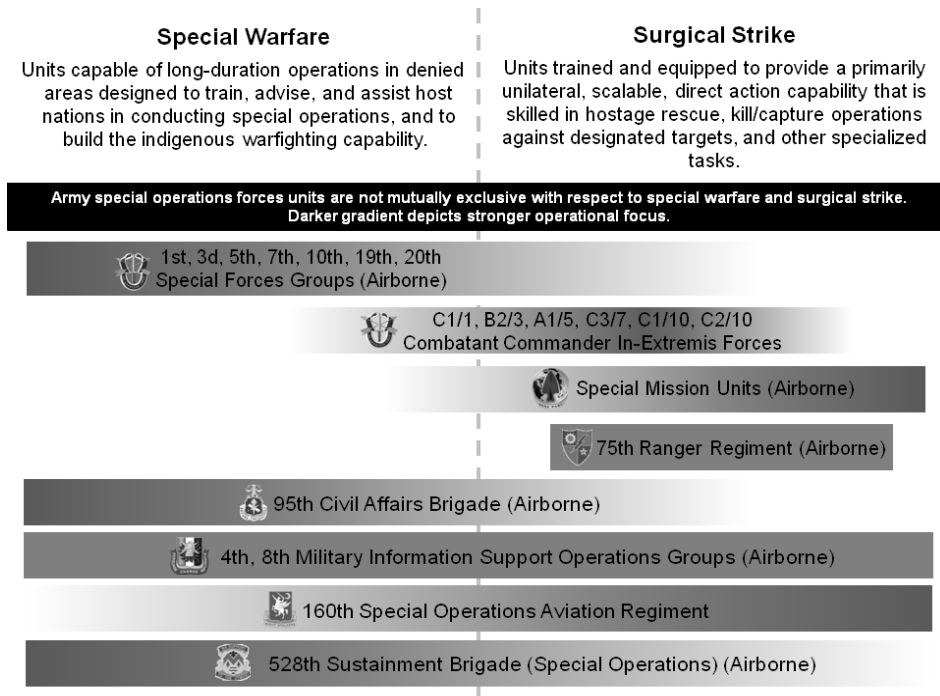


Figure 3. Range of Army SOF Capabilities

Source: ADP 3-05, Special Operations

⁵⁰ JP 3-05, p. I-2.

⁵¹ "Special Operations," *Army Doctrine Publication 3-05*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, August 2012, 8.

SOF direct strike capacities exist under a cloak of secret and ultra-secret operational units and missions. Those mission sets certainly are concerned with the nature of unlit spaces in so far as discrete targets might persist in them. However, technology, unique training, and the element of surprise enable those kinds of SOF missions to take place in spite of the area. The units conducting direct strike operations tend to fulfill an anecdotal narrative akin to an elite global crime fighting force battling rogue and otherwise wicked individuals around the world. The killing of the notorious Medellin drug cartel kingpin, Pablo Escobar, is one such example.⁵² Recent examples include the raid to capture (ultimately kill) Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, Predator drone strikes in Yemen and Somalia, and the killing of Somali pirates in 2009. Each of these SOF operations were conducted in unlit spaces, but their surgical nature was irrespective of geo-political location. Theoretically they could have taken place in more evolved and more lit places, barring international legal justifications (note that legal justifications are similar to both lines of operation).

SOF operations that take an indirect approach, such as UW, require a more comprehensive understanding of the operational environment because forces will operate in a human domain attempting to disappear into the population of an unlit space. That disappearing act is why the UW planner must take a closer look at the unlit space to see why it is unlit and how the nature of the area's darkness affords the SOF element physical and cognitive maneuver space. The relative advantage in UW comes from the interplay of two forces.

The process of entering an unlit space is as much a tactical feat as it is a strategic challenge because of issues related to accessibility. Entering Somalia under the guise of humanitarian assistance in the early 1990s was an altogether different environmental dynamic than entering Somalia after the famed "Black Hawk Down" incident in 1993. Moreover, entering

⁵² Bowden, Mark, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for The World's Greatest Outlaw*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001.

Somali in 2011 at the height of the Al Shabaab movement and even today after the Al Shabaab movement has been reduced significantly, presents tactical challenges let alone international legal hindrances. Once SOF breach the accessibility challenges, their physical decisive advantage is buttressed with the cognitive obstacle of gaining and maintaining momentum with a resistance force. The notorious instigator of community uprisings, Saul Alinsky, warns that “A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag. Man can sustain militant interest in any issue for only a limited time, after which it becomes a ritualistic commitment.”⁵³ SOF planners, therefore, must understand why a space is unlit when conducting indirect SOF operations more so than when conducting direct or surgical strike operations.

Since the nature of UW operations is, by definition, extremely politically sensitive, an array of domestic and international legalities restricts the extent to which U.S. forces interfere with a state’s governance.⁵⁴ When SOF engages in UW, they assume a high degree of risk in terms of the legality of the operations and with respect to individual legal protections as either combatants or non-combatants. When employing SOF to achieve strategic aims, the joint force commander and USSOCOM consider certain criteria.⁵⁵ When zooming into the characteristics of unlit spaces, SOF planners must examine two in particular: operational feasibility, and justification of the risk.⁵⁶

SOF planners approach UW with problem solving techniques such as the Army Design Methodology. Joint elements of operational design, especially the end state, objectives, and

⁵³ Alinsky, Saul D., *Rules For Radical A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*, New York: Vintage Books, 1971, 128. This phenomenon is the seventh rule of power tactics.

⁵⁴ "Special Forces Unconventional Warfare," *TC 18-01*, Department of the Army, January 2011, 3-15.

⁵⁵ "Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare," *FM 3-05.130*, Department of the Army, September 2008, 3-13. The five criteria to support a joint campaign are: mission appropriateness, support to campaign plan, operational feasibility, resources available, justification of risk.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

effects, shape the way a UW plan will either coerce, disrupt, or overthrow belligerent governance.⁵⁷ Before gaining access to a denied area the SOF UW planner examines the operational environment for factors related to current governing conditions within a territorial space. Those current conditions determine the feasibility of inserting a team or teams to interact with selected resistance elements. Operationally, an unlit space should provide a feasible realm in which SOF may operate. For instance, a huge portion of the earth is covered by oceans and seas, but those areas (naturally unlit) are limiting both in scale and in scope, making them practically infeasible to many kinds of SOF operations.

Commanders, to include theater commanders, assume a high level of risk when they employ SOF. However, indirect operations are especially dangerous because they occur secretly between the political tensions of opposing actors. Hence operational UW planners should heed the classic warning by Colonel C.E. Callwell: “The commander who takes the field against guerillas [sic] or savages, or hill-men must make up his mind to strike hard, to move rapidly in spite of the impediments which encumber him, to pursue relentlessly after a victory has been won and to seize the first possible moment for a counter-stroke should he meet with reverse.”⁵⁸

When considering SOF as an option for unlit spaces, USSOCOM must take into account the varying degrees of expertise related to the intended capability and desired effect. Unlit spaces have minimal impact on SOF missions along the direct strike line of effort because the application of force into specified areas for a targeted purpose relies more on legal justifications. Using targeted force to adjudicate a specific threat entails quick actions with immediate effects.

⁵⁷ TC 18-01, 1-1. The current USSOCOM definition of UW considers three objectives: coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power.

⁵⁸ Callwell, C.E. Colonel, *Small Wars A Tactical Textbook for Imperial Soldiers*, Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1990, originally printed 1896. Originally published in 1896, *Small Wars* is a classical text for British commanders and planners to engage in small wars – those against insurrections, revolutions, rebellions, and guerrillas. The SOF UW mission comprises the essence of fomenting insurrection, revolution, rebellion, and guerrilla warfare. Thus, to understand how to wage insurgent warfare, UW planners need the principles of counter-insurgent warfare.

JSOC prosecution of terrorist subjects and "surgical" drone strikes of similar terrorist threats are examples quick actions with immediate effects.⁵⁹ These are managed at the strategic level in conjunction with the executive office and are conducted, to a certain extent, irrespective of the physical and political environment. However, unlit spaces do affect the SOF indirect missions such as civil affairs operations, MISO, and unconventional warfare. Indirect missions, or special warfare, like UW, differ from direct strike missions because they rely more on prolonged interactions with people.

This monograph will look at the case examples of Afghanistan and Somalia and how their unique settings during different time periods factor into planning considerations for conducting unconventional warfare in particular. Unconventional warfare planning provides a useful lens to further analyze characteristics of unlit spaces. When SOF planners consider UW options, they apply a large proportion of their planning efforts to understanding the operational environment. The Army manual for the conduct of unconventional warfare highlights understanding the operational environment as “[t]he most import” consideration.⁶⁰ Thus, to understand unlit spaces further, in the context of SOF mission planning, is to understand fully the operational environment. That is why identifying unlit spaces on an image of the earth only begins to orient an operational planner to a geographic location. Within that darkened geographic location exists a wide variety of characteristics, physically and socially, that shape the ability to conduct SOF operations.

ACCESS

Two concepts must merge as USSOCOM considers where to apply direct or indirect approaches to unlit spaces – the nature of the space and accessibility. The framework for Unlit

⁵⁹ Zenko, Micah, *Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies*, Council Special Report No. 65, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2013, 8. See also *Living Under Drones*, a collaborative study by the Stanford Law School and NYU Law School

⁶⁰ FM3-05.130, 4-1.

Spaces (Table 1) attempts to provide a link with which to further analyze the feasibility of a SOF solution to unlit space problems. This is particularly critical when determining the right mix of SOF capabilities potentially needed to enter a particular area of interest. For example if an unconventional warfare strategy seems prudent in a region, feasibility becomes first and foremost, *the* determining factor whether or not unconventional warfare even makes sense as a strategy.⁶¹ The extent to which the USG can access an area is entailed in a feasibility assessment. Questions such as how hostile is the prevailing power and how active is a black market inform not only commanders but policy makers if SOF can feasibly penetrate and shape an environment.⁶² Furthermore, international and domestic U.S. laws weigh heavily into decisions and into the execution of such sensitive accessibility operations as unconventional warfare. Some of those unique authorities are derived from Title 10 and Title 50 authorizations. However, U.S. policies that grant special permissions, such as the wearing of certain uniforms and clothing articles may protect SOF domestically but not internationally.⁶³ Therefore, the legal ramifications of accessing unlit spaces must carefully be considered.

Richard Kugler, in a recent study for the Institute for National Strategic Studies makes the following observation with regard to the future of accessibility:

Gaining access to contested zones, it [QDR 2010] claims, is critical to the U.S. strategy of forward defense and power projection in multiple regions, including the Middle East and Asia. In the past, it argues, this capacity could often be taken for granted, but in tomorrow's world, this no longer will be the case because potential adversaries are striving to acquire military capabilities that, unless countered, could deny access to U.S. forces, thereby permitting uncontested aggression by them.⁶⁴

⁶¹ TC 18-01, 1-3. Feasibility is the first criteria and arguably the most important criteria when determining whether or not to execute a UW campaign. A feasibility assessment includes analyzing factors such as the physical and human environment to include geopolitical factors such as the state of the host governance.

⁶² TC 18-01, Appendix A (Area Study Outline).

⁶³ TC 18-01, 3-1 – 3-21. The scope of this monograph does not seek to reveal the specific nature of unique legal authorities other than to highlight *that* unique legal authorities permit sensitive SOF actions as they relate to access.

⁶⁴ Kugler, 27.

When discussing accessibility one must distinguish between two definitions of accessibility. First, accessibility, in geo-political and strategic terms refers primarily to technological and homeland defense measures a state takes to protect itself from sophisticated military encroachment.⁶⁵ Counter measures to such attacks are called anti-access measures and deal largely with preventing technological intrusion. For instance, naval offensive and defensive deterrents such as submarines comprise a class of anti-access technologies.⁶⁶ Land and sea based surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missiles make up another line of anti-access defense. More recently, anti-access to network infrastructures comprise yet another technological layer of defense in which states prevent other states from accessing information.⁶⁷ That is why Cortez Cooper discusses China's broad "system-of-systems" approach to denying access. His testimony implies that anti-access is in large part a defensive technology of technological systems. Conversely, one could interpret that access or accessibility comprises those technological activities one does to intrude into another state's space.

A second definition of access is the physical breaching of an area. Countermeasures to this definition include area-denial strategies that inhibit the maneuver of external forces within an area.⁶⁸ This monograph explores accessibility related to this second definition because the projection of SOF power to gain an information advantage requires physically operating within a denied area. The JOAC addresses both technological access and power projection access as an "ability to project military force into an operational area with sufficient freedom of action to

⁶⁵ No clear definitions currently exist in Joint doctrines for anti-access or area-denial. For a good explanation of each, see Alcazar, Vincent Colonel, USAF. "Crisis Management and the Anti-Access/Area Denial Problem." *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2012: 42-70.

⁶⁶ Cooper, Cortez A., "Joint Anti-Access Operations China's "System-of-Systems" Approach," *Testimony presented before the U.S. China Economic and Security Review*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, January 27, 2011, 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid. See also pp. 5-6.

⁶⁸ Alcazar, Vincent Colonel, USAF, "Crisis Management and the Anti-Access/Area Denial Problem," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2012: 42-70, 42-44.

accomplish the mission.”⁶⁹ The questions facing a SOF UW planner include: can we get into an unlit space? If so, how? Those questions, seemingly simple, actually entail a deeper understanding of why an unlit space is dark. While geography is an obvious factor, social and political factors pose more nuanced risks that must be mitigated at both the tactical and operational level in order to promote conditions of relative advantage. SOF poses technical expertise, equipment, and training to overcome the physical environmental factors. Operational planning mitigates the risks associated with the nuanced, political and social factors.

The ability to enter an area and conduct SOF operations is a function of the physical environment, the characteristics of governance, and social norms that either restricts, limits, or allows entry into the area of interest. Although, social norms constitute one function of access, they may not be as prohibitive to SOF as governance and the physical environment. This is in part because certain SOF missions, such as UW, rely on some form of an established link to elements of the social network before those operations are considered. Establishing those initial contact links occurs through covert and other clandestine measures. Ultimately SOF cooperates with agencies establishing those links and in some circumstances may even cooperate with agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to conduct covert actions.⁷⁰ Generally, however, the broader SOF roles for indirect operations remain more clandestine than covert.

Moreover, SOF operations like UW include politically sensitive activities within an international legal gray context. By definition UW involves the overthrow of a presiding governing power.⁷¹ The governing situation relates to the way rules and laws are enforced which correlates to the type and degree of risk associated with a clandestine SOF mission. The

⁶⁹ JOAC, i.

⁷⁰ Best, Richard A. Jr., and Andrew Feickert, *Special Operations Forces (SOF) and CIA Paramilitary Operations: Issues for Congress*, CRS Report for Congress, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2009, 2.

⁷¹ TC 18-01, 1-1.

association does not state that the greater the lawlessness the greater the risk to forces and vice versa. Rather, the uniqueness of the enforcement mechanisms within an area affect both the extent to which SOF maintain the cover of their activities and the extent to which the U.S. strategic ends and operational means allow for political risks.

Finally, the physical environment, the literal unlit condition, matters in the early phases of a UW campaign, because a period of critical vulnerability occurs during the infiltration and link-up stages (Figure 1). SOF training and organizational equipment and technologies make the practical aspect of entering unlit spaces fungible. Theoretically SOF can go anywhere. Yaneer Bar-Yam points out that Special Forces' "effectiveness in the recent War in Afghanistan demonstrated how the climate difference between the jungles of Vietnam and the mountains of Afghanistan was not as important as the similarity in the need for small independent teams and highly individualized training."⁷² That is one reason why UW doctrine prioritizes the geography and political characteristics ahead of economic, social and other characteristics when formulating an area study.⁷³ Thus, when SOF planners need to consider entering an unlit space, the factors of governance and the physical environment outweigh the social factors in so far as access is concerned.

⁷² Bar-Yam, Yaneer, *Making Things Work: Solving Complex Problems in a Complex World*, Cambridge: NECSI - Knowledge Press, 2004, 104.

⁷³ TC 18-01, Appendix A, Area Study.

CASE STUDIES



Figure 4. Somalia and Afghanistan

Source: NASA Visible Earth 2012⁷⁴

Afghanistan and Somalia in the early 1990s and currently illustrate how different so-called unlit spaces have distinctly unique characteristics that affect the application and efficacy of utilizing SOF. In the early 1990s, Afghanistan was a failed state. The rise of the Taliban led to a form of governance, but that form of governance was not recognized by most of the international community. Consequently, Afghanistan remained somewhere in the range of a failing and failed state. The SOF approach to accessing Afghanistan in late 2001 accounted for the difficulty of entering loosely sovereign borders and raising an “insurgent” alliance to overthrow the Taliban. Today, Afghanistan could be categorized as trending toward a more stable fragile state with one

⁷⁴ This image of Afghanistan is modified from the NASA Visible Earth 2012 Image available at: <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/view.php?id=79765&src=ve> (accessed November 1, 2012). Visible in this section, from west to east, are eastern Africa, the Saudi Arabian peninsula, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

exception. There remains heavy external control by the United States and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners to transition to legitimacy in terms of governance and security. Furthermore, even as a fragile state on the road to recovery, there remains other forms of unlit sub-state space internally, such as the ungoverned Shahiddi Hassas district of Uruzgan province. It is the mismatch of these different areas that is important to understand because they each require different approaches to engagement.

Similarly, Somalia has travelled through a range of unlit space categories. When the Muhammad Siad Barre regime collapsed in 1991, Somalia quickly fell from a very fragile state to dominate the definition of a failed state. Somalia remained failed for almost two decades, but while the country as a whole was failed, areas of Somalia were not. In fact, those areas such as Somaliland and Puntland specifically, developed their own forms of governance in reaction to the complete lack of centralized governmental control. However, in places like Puntland, which developed its own, independent government, that informal, undergoverned phenomenon devolved from a semi-legitimate polity to shadow governance controlled by pirates and the economy of piracy. Today, Somalia is making real steps toward legitimizing a central government complete with a new constitution and a domestic economy staged to propel the country toward some sort of legitimate independence from outside interveners. What these two case studies will show is that unlit spaces comprise greater complexities than merely a geographic location without light. They entail nuances of governance, which affect the feasibility of access by SOF to employ U.S. national strategic interest generally and USSOCOM missions specifically.

Using current doctrinal manuals for unconventional warfare, the following case studies will attempt to demonstrate some characteristics of unlit spaces as they relate to UW planning considerations? The following questions will guide analyzing these cases. Why is the country/area unlit: what governing characteristics contribute to the area being unlit and what physical characteristics factor into a lack of light? What do those considerations mean for employing SOF in an unconventional role? While there are myriad factors to consider when

analyzing a country or area, those that fall within the purview of governance and geography are the most significant to overcome when performing UW because they determine the relative advantage a SOF team might gain when accessing an unlit space.⁷⁵ After all, “UW has a political end state.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Stanford Law School and NYU School of Law, *Living Under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians from US Drone Practices in Pakistan*, International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School and Global Justice Clinic at NYU School of Law, 2012, 4. Researchers at the Stanford University and New York University's law schools faced real difficulties accessing information from Pakistan's FATA. They found it was "very difficult for foreigners physically to access FATA, partly due to the Pakistani government's efforts to block access through heavily guarded checkpoints, and partly due to serious security risks."

⁷⁶ FM 3-05.130, 4-2.

Afghanistan



Figure 5. Afghanistan Unlit Depicting Kabul and Kandahar

Source: *NASA Visible Earth 2012*⁷⁷

Background

A space image of Afghanistan at night reveals how unlit the country is. Only Kabul and Kandahar, the two dominate cities in the northern and southern regions, respectively, appear as minimal clusters of modern civilization. However, the image alone does not explain why Afghanistan lacks light. It only reveals that the country is mostly dark.

⁷⁷ This image of Afghanistan is modified from the NASA Visible Earth 2012 Image available at: <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/view.php?id=79765&src=ve> (accessed November 1, 2012). Highlighted in the image are the major cities of Kabul in the north and Kandahar in the south.

Afghanistan is a landlocked, South Asian country surrounded by Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and China. Very few paved roads exist. Only one major paved highway connects the northern part of the country with the southern part. A second highway extends from Kabul east through Peshawar, Pakistan headed towards India.⁷⁸ Most of the remaining desert and mountainous country is accessible either by dirt roads or by foot along paths. With virtually no modernized transportation system, exporting to neighboring countries is extremely difficult. In the Nangarhar district in the eastern part of the country, for instance, “[because of] the lack of available export mechanisms, up to 30 percent of produce grown in Nangarhar rots in the field.”⁷⁹ Nangarhar is fortunate because it is near the border of Pakistan. Much of the import/export business in that district occurs directly across the border.

Pakistan is a major trade partner with Afghanistan and relatively easy to trade with because of the proximity. However, the further inland one goes into Afghanistan, the more difficult the transportation becomes. Moreover, the further into the mountainous north and east one goes, the more isolated pockets of population become since access to those pockets is largely by foot or by animal.⁸⁰ Modernized, paved roads are limited. Moving agriculture and other products is both challenging and slow. Additionally, transporting goods often means travelling through so-called “no-man lands” where law and order exists in more localized rather than centralized forms.⁸¹ A truck driver risks his life moving goods through those dangerous areas.

⁷⁸ The Grand Trunk Road is one of the oldest and longest trade highways in South Asia extending from Kabul, Afghanistan to Chittagong, Bangladesh.

⁷⁹ Spencer, David K., "Afghanistan's Nangarhar Inc.," *Military Review*, 2009: 34-40, 37.

⁸⁰ The author's own experiences in Afghanistan's mountainous north, east, and central regions revealed that people living in population pockets relied heavily on donkeys and camels to transport goods.

⁸¹ The Liaison Office (TLO), "The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006 to 2010," *The Liaison Office Afghanistan*. August 2010, http://www.tloafghanistan.org/images/PDF_Provincial_District_and_Area_Assessments/2010-TLO-Dutch-Engagement-in-Uruzgan.pdf (accessed January 26, 2013). Hereafter TLO Report. In extremely rural areas of Afghanistan, such as the Uruzgan province, central government efforts

There is a security premium placed on the use of those lines of communication. Competition exists, particularly in those very rural and isolated regions for control over those access lines.

Farmers in rural Afghanistan find themselves even more land-locked in an already land-locked country. Pockets of villages that only trade with neighboring villages litter the central, southwestern and northern parts of the country. This is an interesting demographic phenomenon because the majority of Afghans live in rural Afghanistan as a subsistence economy.⁸² Twenty-three percent of the population has access to potable drinking water. Electricity is scarce. Only two percent of the population has access to the Internet. Seventy percent of the population lives below the poverty line of two dollars per day.⁸³ That population is scattered throughout various and unique physical environments. The central and northeastern region is an extremely mountainous segment of the Himalayas. The southwestern region is flatter and more closely resembling arid desert terrain. The northern region is generally a rich agricultural lowland.⁸⁴ These regions sustain the population in distinct ways which further isolates localized forms of governance.

The physical environment in Afghanistan matters for two reasons. First, SOF planners analyze the geography, and climate for technical infiltration and sustainment considerations. Often SOF teams operate independently of any significant bases of support and must rely on local

fail to reach Afghan citizens. Therefore, remote communities maintain their own forms of law and systems of governance.

⁸² Barfield, Thomas J., *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010, 64 (Kindle location 1240-1244).

⁸³ Shackle, Samira, "Afghanistan: facing up to the facts and figures," *New Statesman*, August 17, 2009: 16-17, 28-29. Shackle's research is based on 2009 data, however, very little has change between 2009 and 2013 regarding the physical nature of Afghanistan to include its infrastructure and demographic distribution.

⁸⁴ Library of Congress, "Country Study Afghanistan," *Library of Congress Country Studies*. 2008, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf> (accessed March 1, 2013). Hereafter Afghanistan Country Study.

procurement and other means to operations.⁸⁵ Given Afghanistan's position as a landlocked country, only two forms of infiltration are available: land and air. The challenge of infiltrating by land is that routes entering the country originate in some countries that are themselves difficult to access, such as Iran and China. Second, pockets of population that are ethnically distinct exist across different geographic zones.⁸⁶ The uniqueness and distinctness of tribal associations within various rural and urban regions present an incredible challenge for SOF operators who must negotiate the Afghan human domain. Moreover, the different geographic zones correspond to different flavors of insurgent activity.⁸⁷

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of Afghan governance throughout the country's modern history has been the distinction between various tribal ethnic associations and those ethnic inter-tribal as well as intra-tribal interactions.⁸⁸ This factor alone, is a key ingredient for SOF UW planners to consider when analyzing governance factors because the interplay between Afghan representation, centralized and decentralized, influence differs depending on which ethnicity comprises the majority representation in a particular region. Ethnic tensions remain the mark of ineffective governance that keeps Afghanistan in the dark today.

Although great democratic changes have occurred since 2001, internally the Afghan government is seen as incompetent and incapable of doing anything. As recently as 2009, "[t]he central government is widely seen as weak, dysfunctional and utterly corrupt."⁸⁹ To have a legitimate economy, the country must first have a legitimate government. In order to have a

⁸⁵ JP 3-05, II-3 and IV-4. One of SOF truths is that SOF often require external support.

⁸⁶ One of the most notable features of Afghanistan's demography is its ethnic tribal associations. Although, that is a large factor to consider for SOF UW planning, this monograph does not attempt to analyze the complexities of Afghan tribal tendencies.

⁸⁷ Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, Report to Congress, Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, April 2010, 23.

⁸⁸ Barfield, 18 (Kindle location 444-451).

⁸⁹ Zakaria, Fareed, "A Turnaround Strategy," *Newsweek*, February 9, 2009: 36-37.

legitimate government in Afghanistan, ethnic biases must be represented. Thus, maneuvering through the legitimacy of the central government or through disparate local forms of governance requires SOF teams to maneuver through a human domain of intense tribal competition.

Afghanistan 1989-2001

For more than 30 years, Afghanistan has been under some kind of control. The Soviets controlled the country throughout the 80s. During the 90s after a period of little to no rule, the Taliban took control. While the United States never recognized the Taliban as a legitimate government, they did establish a system of rule and law, albeit oppressive and degrading. Most recently Afghanistan's security has been under NATO (largely U.S.) control. Granted, the country does have an elected head of state and will have either a new or re-elected head of state following the conclusion of President Hamid Karzai's second term, decisions regarding the future of Afghanistan still rest largely with inputs from external actors, namely the United States, the U.N., and NATO. That external governing influence may change after the 2014 when the United States officially completes its major military operations.

Between 1989 and 2001, Afghanistan struggled with severe governance problems that perpetuated a decade of conflict. It was a failed state. The proxy war between the Soviets and the United States ended in 1989. In effect, U.S. interest in Afghanistan ended at the same time. When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, so too did the international community. Aid efforts did continue throughout the first half of the 90s, but they were not as robust as they had been through the 1980s. The important point is that there was a noticeable void left behind in Afghanistan from the exodus of international actors. During the war in the 1980s, there was no effective government. When the war ended, there still was no effective government. When support withdrew from Afghanistan, it withdrew leaving behind no effective government.

In early 1990-1992, the U.N. attempted a power sharing scheme to bring together the different warring factions left over from the Soviet war. Shah Tarzi points out that, "the U.N.

formula envisioned a power-sharing arrangement – the creation of a 15-member council selected from the various *mujahideen* parties and the Wattan (homeland) Party, the former Communists.”⁹⁰ This arrangement did not work. Tarzi continues, “events quickly overtook the U.N. plan and Najibullah’s government crumbled under the weight of military defections.”⁹¹

For the next few years a series of power grabs between *mujahideen* leader Ahmad Shah Masood, militia leader General Abdul Rashid Doestam, and hardliner Islamist, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar took place. These different warlords jockeyed for premier government positions.⁹² As these three notables and others sought power, efforts by the U.N. to stave off a complete government collapse proved futile. The country moved further into civil war. Combat among the struggling factions grew. A massive refugee problem emerged, and people began fleeing the country to Pakistan and Iran. By the end of 1994, Afghanistan was embroiled in war internally, and the U.N. could do little to help. Zalmay Khalilzad reported that, “Because of the attacks in Kabul, U.N. staff members left and U.N. humanitarian aid declined.”⁹³ A collapse of the government had occurred, and the U.N. had virtually given up. The decline of international interest gave way to the rise of a militant force able to seize control of the country. The Taliban seized Kabul in 1996. Their form of government proved to be inwardly oppressive and outwardly objectionable.

At the heart of Afghanistan’s problems was the complete lack of any government to make policies that reinforce stability. Throughout the 1990s, Afghanistan never effectively created a government. Her struggle to create one coupled with internal struggles between political factions

⁹⁰ Tarzi, Shah M., "Afghanistan in 1992: A Hobbesian State of Nature," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 2 (1993): 165-174, 165-166.

⁹¹ Tarzi, 166.

⁹² Tarzi describes in greater detail the chronology of feuding rebel and political leaders.

⁹³ Khalilzad, Zalmay, "Afghanistan in 1994: Civil War and Disintegration," *Asian Survey* 35, no. 2 (February 1995): 147-152, 149.

led to a governance void that resulted in the take-over of a hostile Taliban regime. That regime hosted terrorist networks and inflicted severe social policies driving the country into further conflict.

This narrative of political fractionalization typifies the pursuits of power throughout the 34 provinces and roughly 361 districts within those provinces.⁹⁴ Woven into the physical environment described by provincial boundaries, was a similar narrative of fractionalized control, led by opposing warlords, village elders, and ruthless political heads. Much of the tension between actors was a function of ethnic and tribal rivalries which were concentrated in regional pockets. Terrain separated those regional pockets. Making accessibility matters worse, between 1989 and 2001 the overall state infrastructure deteriorated because a functioning government never materialized with any degree of capability to improve the country.⁹⁵ The country literally and figuratively was in the dark, a veritable “wild west.” It was a failed state.

Afghanistan after 2002

Immediately after 2002, Afghanistan changed from a failed state to an ungoverned place. An interim Afghan government quickly filled the void of governance with significant assistance from predominantly U.S. forces during the initial period following the Taliban overthrow. After President Hamid Karzai survived an initial election, the country remained temporarily ungoverned because the state apparatus lacked the necessary agency to provide public goods.⁹⁶ The international community retained the majority of the necessary agency to execute public goods in the broad sense of overall state security. Recently, however, international control has

⁹⁴ Afghanistan Country Study, 17.

⁹⁵ *Afghanistan & the United Nations: The 1990s*. n.d., <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/un-afghan-history.shtml> (accessed March 5, 2013).

⁹⁶ Royo, Joseph A., "Agency and International Relations," *e-International Relations*, August 28, 2012, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/08/28/agency-and-international-relations-an-alternative-lens/> (accessed February 27, 2013).

been shifting to the Government of Afghanistan (GIROA).⁹⁷

One of the major distinctions regarding the future accessibility to Afghanistan remains unknown. That is, to what extent do U.S. and international forces remain in Afghanistan in some partnered capacity? And, to what extent do the U.S. and international efforts retain control of what does and does not happen in Afghanistan. This is especially true with regard to security since presently, ISAF and U.S. forces own the greatest share of Afghan security.⁹⁸ The U.S. maintains that it will “remain politically, diplomatically, and economically engaged in Afghanistan as a strategic partner for the long term.”⁹⁹

Since the second democratic election of President Hamid Karzai in 2009, Afghanistan’s governance and the role of a centrally organized, popularly elected polity, has continued to evolve. Outwardly, the central government and representative governorships portray an effort to reach the greater Afghan population. By way of comparison, the United States has a central government representative of regional population clusters. The rule of law is consistent from federal to state to county to city and municipality level. A person in Florida can expect to lead a fairly similar life if they moved to Wisconsin with the exception of benign nuances mostly at the local level. Those nuances might appear in the form of processes for doing business. That is not the case yet in Afghanistan. Different rules apply to different areas and with different tribal networks. Moreover, the extent of insurgent control in hard to reach areas further prevents consistency regarding a uniform rule of law.¹⁰⁰ This is problematic for SOF UW planning

⁹⁷ Afghanistan’s official name is Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

⁹⁸ "Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement Between The United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," *The White House*. May 2, 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2012.06.01u.s.-afghanistansassignedtext.pdf> (accessed April 2, 2013). Afghanistan’s transition is scheduled to occur in 2014.

⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State. *Country Report on Terrorism 2011*, Annual Report, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of State, 2012, 129.

¹⁰⁰ Katzman, Kenneth, *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance*, CRS Report for Congress, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2012, 2, 15.

because different regional and ethnic areas require different forms of sustainment to adhere to different rules of doing business.

Doing business in Afghanistan is difficult depending on which province, which district, and which ethnic majority holds the majority share of social norms in a particular area.¹⁰¹ Currently, Afghanistan is one of the most challenged countries in the world for doing business in large part because factors related to functioning governance such as the registration of property, access to credit, access to inter-regional trade, and access to electricity inhibit business opportunity.¹⁰²

Furthermore, the farther one gets from the major cities the more the political environment changes from centralized governance to semi-autonomous systems of governance especially in the areas with little to no vehicle access or electricity. The Uruzgan province and the various districts within it are examples of this inconsistent governance dynamic. The research group, The Liaison Office (TLO) notes that as of 2009, the central Afghan government has yet to gain access to the Uruzgan province to leverage capital revenues or to extend the reach of services such as electricity.¹⁰³ The Uruzgan province is an example of one province that remains largely disconnected from the rest of Afghanistan. Moreover, certain districts within the Uruzgan province remain entirely unreachable by even the Uruzgan governing apparatus.¹⁰⁴

The conditions in Afghanistan since 2002 differ from the period between 1989 and 2001,

¹⁰¹ In 2012, Afghanistan dropped six positions in the World Bank's annual Doing Business report to 164 out of 183 countries.

¹⁰² TLO Report, 6-8.

¹⁰³ The Liaison Office (TLO), "Three Years Later: A Socio-political Assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009," *The Liaison Office*. September 18, 2009, http://www.tloafghanistan.org/images/PDF_Provincial_District_and_Area_Assessments/2009-TLO-Uruzgan-Assessment.pdf (accessed April 2, 2013), 6. This author's own experiences in the Uruzgan province between 2006-2007 confirm the TLO assessments.

¹⁰⁴ This monograph author's experiences throughout the Uruzgan province include areas around the seat of government in Tarin Kot as well as extensive experience in the most unreachable areas of the Shahidi Hassas (Char China) district.

mostly in terms of the governing architecture. Afghanistan is in transition out of a failed state condition. One of the challenges SOF faces in an area that is transitioning to a better state is the relative legitimacy of the recognized government. As a central government gains or regains control, they gain greater influence permitting SOF UW activities. The political balance USSCOCOM must weigh is between honoring the legitimacy of a central authority and pursuing specific U.S. interests, particularly when the two dynamics diverge along critical lines of effort. In late February, 2012, President Hamid Karzai rejected the consequences of Special Forces actions in Wardak province. Reports following a SOF mission indicated possible civilian casualties, a result of an engagement between SOF and militant forces. President Karzai subsequently ordered Special Forces out of the province placing a deadline on their departure. This kind of political reaction to SOF activities differs in fragile and failing states or in ungoverned and undergoverned areas as opposed to completely failed areas. In a completely failed state, such as Afghanistan between 1989 and 2001, SOF considerations of governance account for the degree of security threat operators may encounter when operating in a denied and unfamiliar space. In states and spaces with some governmental legitimacy, such as Afghanistan since 2002, SOF planning considerations account for the degree of political freedom of maneuver to perform necessary activities in pursuit of strategic and operational interests.

Somalia



Figure 6. Somalia Unlit Depicting Mogadishu

Source: NASA Visible Earth 2012 ¹⁰⁵

Background

Somalia's space image is even more revealing than that of Afghanistan. Barely noticeable is a speck of light emanating from the capital, Mogadishu. The entire peninsula appears blacked out, in part a testament to Somalia's decades long prominence as the world's leading failed state.

¹⁰⁵ This image of Somalia is modified from the NASA Visible Earth 2012 Image available at: <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/view.php?id=79765&src=ve> (accessed December 5, 2012). The capital city of Mogadishu is highlighted.

It is a peninsula state with the longest coastline in Africa. Somalia is, however, a mostly arid desert with less than 2% arable land.¹⁰⁶ Nomads comprise a large portion of the population. Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the world. An informal economy of mostly livestock agriculture and remittances make up a paltry GDP. Piracy is one of the most vibrant business sectors in the northern coastal regions. No legitimate rule of law existed until 2012. No real military or law enforcement apparatus existed to enforce the lack of law. Instead an informal system of localized governance by tribal, nomadic, or criminal groups enforces the way of life. Drought and famine has plagued the country at various points throughout the 1990s. To put it bluntly,” [the] country, wracked by almost two decades of lawless thuggery...is a virtual disaster.”¹⁰⁷

Somalia 1991-2011

Between 1991 and 2011 Somalia was a failed state. In the purest sense of this definition, Somalia lacked any form of representative institutions to maintain order and provide any public goods. For several years running, Somalia topped the indices of state failure, in particular Foreign Policy Magazines’ Failed States Index.¹⁰⁸ One of the clearest descriptions of Somalia comes from Daren Acemoglu and James Robinson in their book, *Why Nations Fail*. They describe the context of Somalia’s political nature as follows:

political power in Somalia has long been widely distributed— almost pluralistic. Indeed there is no real authority that can control or sanction what anyone does. Society is divided into deeply antagonistic clans that cannot dominate one another. The power of one clan is constrained only by the guns of another. This distribution of power leads not to inclusive institutions but to chaos, and at the root of it is the Somali state’s lack of any kind of

¹⁰⁶ *The World Factbook: Somalia*, March 13, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html> (accessed March 20, 2013).

¹⁰⁷ Royo, *Afghanistan Part II*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Foreign Policy Magazine annually publishes a Failed States Index in collaboration with The Fund for Peace. Data supporting the project can be found at: <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/> (accessed January 6, 2013).

political centralization, or state centralization, and its inability to enforce even the minimal amount of law and order to support economic activity, trade, or even the basic security of its citizens.¹⁰⁹

Another popular way to describe the Somalia operational environment, politically, is that it has been in a state of anarchy since the fall of the Siad Barre regime. Some scholars disagree about characterizing Somalia as anarchic given that the function of governance does exist, just not in a centralized form.¹¹⁰ To say that between 1991 and 2011 Somalia had been without a functioning government is not to say that Somalia had been without governance.¹¹¹ Yet, the lack of institutions, namely a constitution that describes the institution of law rendered Somalia literally and virtually lawless until 2012.¹¹² The competition for control in Somalia was largely for control of localized areas and territorial clan stakes. To some extent, the anarchic nature of Somalia actually makes it less of a safe haven for external criminal and terrorist organizations. One study suggests that “[*inter alia*] Somalia’s pragmatic political culture has inoculated Somali society to some degree from radicalism.”¹¹³

Elements that did seek central control, such as Al-Shabaab, did so to gain criminal control of rights to propagate fundamental ideologies and take hold of resources to fund their operations. Moreover, their base of power has not been strong enough to take hold over the entire government apparatus. Had the al-Shabaab group or any other criminal group had any relevant

¹⁰⁹ Acemoglu, Daren, and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2012, 80 (*Kindle locations 1331-1336*).

¹¹⁰ Watts, Clint, Jacob Shapiro, and Vahid Brown, *Al-Qaida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa*, Harmony Project Report, West Point: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2007, 31.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Royo, *Afghanistan Part II*, 2-3.

¹¹³ Watts, et al, 29.

power, Somalia may have seen at least some element seize governing control.¹¹⁴ Other than repeated failed external attempts to launch a federal government, no real governing apparatus emerged to provide public goods either in an inclusive or extractive way.¹¹⁵ Somalia writ large demonstrated neither inclusive nor extractive systems, either of which would have been some form of overarching governance. Thus the anarchic description fits appropriately throughout that twenty year period.

Of course, there are exceptions. One of the reasons unlit spaces need further analysis is because an unlit space does not sufficiently describe the nature of an area. It merely identifies an area on an image as either dark or light and in some cases with varying degrees of light.

Somaliland and Puntland are two Somali governing exceptions within the territorial boundary of Somalia. “Both claim relative independence. Both claim separate semi-functioning governments. Both even claim separate forms of currency. None of which is formally recognized by the U.N. or other member states.”¹¹⁶

A SOF planner looking at Somalia in the context of framing the operational environment for a UW operational approach must look at three distinct but related sub-states with distinct but related political considerations that are distinctly yet collectively recognized with international legitimacy.

This matters to the SOF planner because the nature of Afghanistan’s unlit circumstances in the 1990s differs from that of Somali. Afghanistan’s elites and influential warlords sought a

¹¹⁴ Herbst, Jeffrey, *States and Power in Africa*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000, 255. A lack of sufficient power of any group has contributed to Somalia’s prolonged state failure. Although, his study was published in 2000, his conclusions with regard to the relevant power of organizations seizing government control remain true as of 2011.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, and pp. 4-5. See also Acemoglu and Robinson, pp. 75-76 for more on inclusive and extractive eco-political systems. Generally inclusive systems incentivize the population to regenerate wealth and opportunity, whereas extractive systems take wealth from society to support an elite subset.

¹¹⁶ Royo, *Afghanistan Part II*, 8.

form of central control; a prevailing feature of Afghanistan's governing architecture. There was a governing entity to overthrow. Somalia, however, remained fractured in a way that avoided a central governing structure. Therefore, the nature of planning a SOF UW intervention would be drastically different in those two unlit spaces. Accessing an area with potential pockets of resistance against a central authority would require different aims than accessing an area in which no pockets of resistance exist because there is no main authority. Even international aid organizations have difficulty getting access to regions of Somalia because the prevailing lawless threat by criminal and terrorist groups, such as al Shabaab thus, denying external aid to needy people.¹¹⁷

Somalia after 2011

Towards the end of 2011 and into 2012, the political and security situation in Somalia began to change. The TFG began its mandated transition to a post transition government beginning with the adoption of a new constitution by a new parliament and the election of a new head of state, Hasan Sheikh Mohamud.¹¹⁸ The transition was significant for two reasons. One, leading up to the transition, AMISOM forces and Somali military forces made substantial gains against al-Shabaab strongholds in Mogadishu.¹¹⁹ In 2011 the tide turned against al-Shabaab. African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces regained a measure of initiative specifically

¹¹⁷ "Assessing the Consequences of the Failed State of Somalia," *Joint Hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives*, Vols. Serial No. 112-99, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 7, 2011, 18-20. Hereafter *Somalia Hearing*. Nancy Lindborg testified on behalf of the USAID regarding the difficulties getting aid into and throughout Somalia, largely because internal belligerent groups thwarted efforts by the USAID and other NGOs to deliver aid.

¹¹⁸ *United Nations Political Office for Somalia*. n.d., <http://unpos.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=9705&language=en-US> (accessed April 2, 2013). See also Jason Mosley, *End of the Roadmap* and Jon Lunn, *In Brief: Somalia*.

¹¹⁹ United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia*, S/2012/643, New York: United Nations, 2012, 6. See also, Saferworld report, *Mogadishu Rising*, p. 2.

in the capital city of Mogadishu through a series of successful operations against al-Shabaab military forces.¹²⁰ In August 2011, al-Shabaab withdrew from Modadishu in a move seen as either a sign of their potential weakness and decline or a necessary reorganization.¹²¹ Two, the central political apparatus appears to be making the most constructive legitimacy progress in over 20 years and 14 attempts of establishing central governing authority.¹²² Similar to Afghanistan, this means the legitimacy of a central authority matters more now because one actually exists. Nevertheless, the political and security situation in Somalia remains challenging. Jon Lunn warned the UK Parliament that “while greatly improved [security] in Mogadishu and in some other parts of the country, remains fragile and could yet go into reverse.”¹²³ A Harmony Project report about Al-Qaeda’s interest in eastern Africa notes that, “[c]urrent events in Somalia are hard to interpret.”¹²⁴ Al-Shabaab continues to pose serious threat challenges particularly related to governance because in 2011 al-Shabaab underwent a restructuring of its organizational hierarchy.¹²⁵ In testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in 2011, Dr. Pham presented a disturbing narrative of al-Shabaab as a decentralized and potentially self-regenerating organization. When they decentralized, al-Shabaab’s central leadership delegated authority and autonomy to dedicated regional commands. Those commands, act like an operational level

¹²⁰ Mosley, Jason, *End of the Roadmap: Somalia After the London and Istanbul Conferences*, Africa Programme Paper AFP PP2012/04, London: June, 2012, 5.

¹²¹ Kisiangani, Emmanuel, *Comparing Somalia's al-Shabaab and Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army*, ISS Paper 229, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2011, 5.

¹²² *BBC News Africa Somalia Profile*, October 24, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094503> (accessed April 2, 2013).

¹²³ Lunn, 2.

¹²⁴ Watts, et al, 45.

¹²⁵ *Somalia Hearing*, 45. Dr. Pham’s testified as the director of the Michael S. Ansari Africa Center Atlantic Council. His testimony dealt largely with the consequences of al-Shabaab threat to stability within Somalia and throughout the region.

mechanism to achieve a grander strategic aim.¹²⁶ The extent to which that strategic aim is synchronized is speculative considering the ongoing debate as to whether al-Shabaab is in fact an arm of al Qaida or merely associated with the idea of al Qaida.¹²⁷

This systematic decentralization of operational control presents an altogether unique governing situation for the UW operational planner. Although the country functions through largely decentralized clan and territorial control, the lack of centralization does not mean a lack of societal integration. Some reports indicate that the Somali culture is one of integration and consensus regarding the execution of decisions.¹²⁸ This presents an interesting dichotomy for both terrorist organizations and USSOCOM elements wishing to gain access to Somalia. When al-Qaeda analyzed Somalia as a base of operation, some al-Qaeda operatives considered the environment ill-suited to maintain secrecy because the interconnectedness of clan assemblies generated an exposure risk too difficult to overcome.¹²⁹ If al-Qaeda concluded that Somalia's accessibility was not conducive for basing operations, then SOF efforts to similarly base for UW operations would be especially risk prone.

As with Afghanistan, a newly elected and newly legitimized central governing authority changes the political operational environment. Prior to 2012, SOF UW infiltration considerations would have accounted for the disparate security threats associated with areas under different types of control. Access would have been gained surreptitiously in support of actors favorable to U.S. objectives. After 2012, a new layer of political authority requires the invitation by Somali

¹²⁶ Kisiangani, 4. See also Roland Marchal's NOREF Report, p. 10 in which he discusses similarities between Mali and Somali, specifically the mischaracterized similarity between al-Shabaab and AQIM offshoots in Mali. Marchal points out that al-Shabaab's restructuring was an attempt to associate more closely with population groups.

¹²⁷ *Somalia Hearing*, 45-47. Dr. Pham notes the disagreement among analysts and academics regarding the connection between al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda.

¹²⁸ Watts, et al, 43.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

leadership into Somalia in spite of the areas under uncertain control.

FINDINGS

The overall governing architecture within a geographic region contributes to an area's capacity to build an infrastructure that produces visible light. When the governing architecture fails or is not capable of providing goods to the general public, as both Afghanistan and Somalia demonstrate, then the nature of their operating environment makes them prone to being unlit. However, their unlit condition only identifies them from space as being unlit. Accessing each has less to do with that they are unlit and more to do with who manifests the governing conditions. In both case studies, determining the governing tendencies of unlit spaces is as important as determining who controls the form of governance within the unlit space.

The labels unlit space, fragile states, failing states, etc., are not sufficient descriptors to effectively plan SOF operations particularly those operations that involve influencing the human domain such as UW. They only begin to characterize potential factors for SOF to consider when accessing those kinds of places. When no effective government existed in either Afghanistan or Somalia, the operational environments posed security risks to SOF operators in terms of their ability to avoid detection and capture. SOF operators needed adeptness at negotiating with criminal groups and warring ethnic factions. Afghanistan and Somalia pose new accessibility challenges related to the authority of new governments to regulate external accessibility.

Although the physical environment is an important factor to consider when looking for ways to access an area, the human environment, presents a greater set of nuanced considerations that are unique and distinct and cannot fit within an overarching descriptive term. Since the human domain varies in unlit spaces, SOF planners must understand more completely the operational environment as it relates to the human dimension. Even within an unlit space, the human domain may change depending on the type of prevailing governance, either formal or informal, the kinds of social norms, such as ethnic and tribal associations, as well as the extent to

which formal and informal mechanisms enforce rules of law. In unlit spaces, such as Afghanistan and Somalia, these factors make accessing potential resistance elements more difficult because the nature of the human domain is not entirely consistent across unlit spaces in general or even within a single unlit space in particular.

This difficulty is exacerbated even further when one factors the dimensions of social connectedness. Recent social technologies add a new layer of risk to SOF teams attempting to hide within the social fabric of an unlit space. Previous attempts to enter those societies would have been met with certain interconnected social norms whereby information travels through various human networks. This was the case more so in Somalia than in Afghanistan. Maneuvering through the human domain in the 1990s and early 2000s would have required SOF operators to vet personal relationships one-on-one and in the context of personal interactions.

That dynamic has since changed as the proliferation of information technologies manifestly increase the ease with which societies weave virtual fabrics of connectedness. The technological social connectedness phenomenon has specifically shaped the nature of recruitment efforts to radical ideologies. “Social networks appear to be central to the radicalization process and to terrorist plots as well. Networks can be actual groups—encompassing intimate kinship ties, bonds of friendship, links forged in student associations, or cliques tied to radical mosques. They may also be virtual and fostered by the Internet.”¹³⁰ Given both country’s distinctions as ethnic and tribally based societies and given both country’s propensities to foster radical and extreme groups (al-Qaeda, Taliban, al-Shabaab), both countries share the potential to exploit virtual interconnectedness through social technologies. This poses new challenges related to the ease with which SOF operators hide within the human domain as socially connected societies share information through virtual and instant technology networks. In spite of appearing unlit developmentally, Afghanistan and Somalia potentially light up the cyber domain with

¹³⁰ Bjelopera, Jerome P., *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat*, CRS Report to Congress, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2013, 19.

information hindering SOF access.

CONCLUSION

The new USSOCOM Commander, Admiral William McRaven recently testified that SOF were a, "cost effective hedge against uncertainty."¹³¹ SOF are well postured to engage the unlit spaces around the globe with unique direct and indirect capabilities. However, before committing to any strategy within those spaces, USSOCOM should clearly understand the relevant aspects of the types of unlit spaces and the ramifications of accessibility to specific regions. There are distinct differences to the various kinds of unlit spaces. Each area displays unique characteristics. Accessing each area requires either varying degrees of specialization or varying degrees of political consideration or both. Therefore, a careful study beyond semantics necessitates a useful framework with which to categorize and analyze strategic engagement. This monograph intends to stimulate further discussion of so-called unlit spaces through the framework analysis tool to clarify more precisely SOF roles and SOF impacts in those regions.

This monograph cautions against the operational planning notion that unlit spaces are a generalized phenomenon and require SOF intervention. The term unlit spaces is an interesting descriptive view of the world, but it lacks specificity with regard to the nature of conditions within an unlit space. The category is too broad and comprises too many variables unrelated to either national security threats or national interests. Rather, context is key when planning for SOF missions in unlit spaces because the actual dynamics of a particular area vary. Typology characterizations only provide some insight into political nature of an area. Accessibility into those areas depends on a further analysis of the human domain in relation to the operational environment.

¹³¹ McRaven Testimony.

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