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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**SPECIAL FORCES OPERATIONAL DETACHMENT-A
IN 2035**

by

Eric S. Mann and Maximilian L. Soto

December 2019

Thesis Advisor:
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Robert E. Burks
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SPECIAL FORCES OPERATIONAL DETACHMENT-A IN 2035

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ABSTRACT

In accordance with the U.S. Army's current modernization efforts, this thesis examines the Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha in great power competition. The purpose of this research is to analyze the current tactical capability of Army Special Forces to determine what organizational modification or optimization is required to be successful in the future operating environment. The authors examined case studies of historic modification and determined that the prevailing causes of capability adaptation have been driven by political, economic, societal, and technological environmental change. The authors then applied these factors to current global trends to determine necessary future adaptation. Based on this research, the authors recommend an information warfare specialist within the Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha to ensure relevancy and success in the future environment.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	UNITED STATES SPECIAL FORCES ORIGINS.....	1
A.	U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS CAPABILITY IN WWII.....	1
	1. The Office of Strategic Service; European Concept.....	2
	2. The Operational Groups	3
	3. Jedburgh Teams.....	4
	4. The Office of Strategic Service; Pacific Theater Concept.....	5
B.	POST-WAR DOLDRUMS FOR U.S. SOF	6
	1. Birth of the U.S. Psychological Warfare Center	6
	2. Creating the Special Forces construct.....	7
C.	RECRUITMENT WOES	8
	1. The Lodge Act	9
II.	THE FIRST SFOD-A MODEL DURING THE BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR	13
A.	THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	13
	1. The Political Environment	13
	2. Social Change	15
	3. The Economic Environment	16
	4. Technological Change.....	17
B.	MISSION AND TASKS	17
C.	ORGANIZATION AND CAPABILITIES.....	18
D.	CONCLUSION	22
III.	MODEL II: VIETNAM AND THE WARS OF LIBERATION	23
A.	THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	23
	1. The Political Environment	23
	2. Social Change	27
	3. The Economic Environment	28
	4. Technological Change.....	28
B.	MISSION AND TASKS (1950–1973).....	30
C.	ORGANIZATION AND CAPABILITIES.....	35
D.	CONCLUSION	39
IV.	BEYOND VIETNAM AND TO THE WAR OF TERROR.....	41
A.	THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	41
	1. The Political Environment	41
	2. Social Change	45

3.	The Economic Environment	46
4.	Technological Change.....	46
B.	MISSION AND TASKS	49
C.	ORGANIZATION AND CAPABILITIES (1973-2019).....	56
D.	CONCLUSION	59
V.	THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT	61
A.	A SHIFT IN PRIORITY	61
B.	THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT	63
C.	THE COMPETITIVE SPACE	67
D.	COMPETITIVE WORLD ACTORS	68
1.	Russia	68
2.	China	72
3.	Islamic Republic of Iran.....	73
VI.	CONCLUSION	77
A.	THE FUTURE ENVIRONMENT.....	77
B.	ORGANIZATION AND CAPABILITIES (FUTURE).....	78
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	83
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	95

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	The OSS Operational Group structure.....	4
Figure 2.	10th SFG organizational chart.	19
Figure 3.	The structure of the original SFOD-A tasked with the experimental CIDG mission	36
Figure 4.	The Mike Force Battalion Organization	37
Figure 5.	SFOD-A with Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations imbed.....	38
Figure 6.	Causal loop diagram of the strategic nature of the environment	67
Figure 7.	Estimation of Quds Force partners 2011–2018.	76

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Russian SOF operations in Ukraine.....71

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ASD	Assistant Secretary of Defense
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CA	Civil Affairs
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CLD	Causal Loop Diagram
COIN	Counter Insurgency
CSAR	Combat Search and Rescue
CSD	Combined Studies Division
CST	Coalition Support Teams
CT	Counter Terrorism
CTS	Counter-Terrorist Service
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zones
DA	Direct Action
DoD	Department of Defense
DP	Displaced Person
EU	European Union
FA	Functional Area
FB	Functional Bravo
FC	Functional Charlie
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
FTX	Field Training Exercise
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GPC	Great Power Competition
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
HA	Humanitarian Assistance
HHC	Headquarters and Headquarters Company

HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
ICDC	Iraqi Civil Defense Corps
ICTF	Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Force
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
ISOF	Iraqi Special Operations Force
IW	Irregular Warfare
JTAC	Joint Terminal Air Controller
L.H.	Lebanese Hezbollah
LZ	Landing Zones
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MDO	Multi-Domain Operations
MFP	Major Force Program
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
MNFI	Multi National Forces Iraq
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MTT	Mobile Training Team
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
OCPW	Office of the Center for Psychological Warfare
OG	Operational Group
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PLA	People's Liberation Army (China)
PMC	Private Military Contractors
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
PSYWAR	Psychological Warfare
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
RIF	Reductions in Force
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
ROK	Republic of Korea
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

SFARTAETC	Special Forces Advanced Reconnaissance Target Analysis and Exploitation Techniques Course
SFAUCC	Special Forces Advanced Urban Combat Course
SFG	Special Forces Group
SFOD	Special Forces Operational Detachment
SFOD-A	Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SO	Special Operations
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOLIC	Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict
SOTAC	Special Operations Tactical Air Controller
SR	Special Reconnaissance
TO&E	Table of Organization and Equipment
U.S.	United States
UN	United Nations
USASFV	United States of America Special Forces Vietnam
USSF	United States Special Forces
UW	Unconventional Warfare
VEO	Violent Extremist Organizations
VFC	Volunteer Freedom Corps
VSO	Village Stability Operations

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I. UNITED STATES SPECIAL FORCES ORIGINS

As a primer to this topic, it is essential to examine the origin of the United States Special Forces (USSF) and comprehend the unit's original capability. From this, it is possible to depict an uninterrupted line of adaptation of the Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (SFOD-A). While there are numerous Special Operations units which preceded its creation, USSF and its core mission of Unconventional Warfare (UW) can most definitively trace its origin to the Office of Strategic Service (OSS) during World War II (WWII).

A. U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS CAPABILITY IN WWII

The United States' late entry into WWII meant that mobilization efforts lagged behind axis and allies in the war. To enable rapid expansion of capability, especially in regard to specialized units, the United States drew from British units that demonstrated strategic capability. Such was the case of with OSS, which drew its impetus from the British Special Operations Executive (SOE). Formed in 1940, the SOE was created by merging the offices of "Section D of MI6" and "General Staff (Research)," a branch of the War Office.¹ The initial purpose of this unit was to organize and establish British-backed resistance groups, provide intelligence, and wage a guerrilla war against the Nazis and Italians in occupied territories.² Impressed with the British commando units, U.S. senior ranking generals like George C. Marshall became interested in creating similar capabilities for the United States.³

As the U.S. had no SOF at the start of WWII, multiple avenues were initially attempted to create units capable of generating operational and strategic effects similar the SOE. The initial focus of the U.S. Army was the creation of elite infantry units to execute

¹ A. R. B. Linderman, *Rediscovering Irregular Warfare: Colin Gubbins and the Origins of Britain's Special Operations Executive* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 2.

² Richard Gough, *SOE Singapore: 1941-42* (Singapore: Heinemann, 1985).

³ Alfred H. Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins*, Rev. ed, (Lawrence, KS University Press of Kansas, 2002).

commando operations. These units included the U.S. Army Rangers and the joint U.S. / Canadian venture known as the 1st Special Service Force.⁴ However, like their British counterparts, these units suffered excruciating losses and provided limited strategic impact because they were often employed conventionally to achieve tactical results.⁵

1. The Office of Strategic Service; European Concept

Similarly impressed by the British SOE was WWI Medal of Honor recipient turned influential attorney and personal advisor to President Roosevelt, William “Wild Bill” Donovan.⁶ The concept that Donovan lobbied and ultimately received approval for, was drastically different than the commando operations that were to be executed. Rather than creating shock-troops, Donovan foresaw the need for a “paramilitary-like organization [to conduct] a variety of wartime missions unconventional in nature.”⁷ This unit would not focus on attacking hard targets but would instead, follow Winston Churchill’s directive to the SOE and attempt to “set Europe ablaze” through sabotage, subversion, and ambush.⁸

Donovan’s personality and understanding of the strategic context which, in his view demanded the creation of the OSS, shaped his initial perceptions of the unit’s wartime role. To this end, Donovan assumed that any mission that was not conventional would naturally belong to his organization.⁹ However, clarification via a directive from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, limited his unit’s role to “the organization and conduct of guerilla warfare” and restricted assigned personnel to roles as “organizers, fomenters, and operational nuclei of

⁴ For a more detailed history of the U.S. Army Ranger contributions during WWII, read David W. Hogan, “The Evolution of the Concept of the U.S. Army’s Rangers, 1942-1983” (Duke University, 1986).

⁵ Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare*.

⁶ Douglas C. Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

⁷ Thomas K. Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare* (London ; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1998), 34.

⁸ Hugh Dalton and Ben Pimlott, *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton: 1940 - 1945* (London: Cape, 1986), 62.

⁹ Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action*.

guerilla units.”¹⁰ These restrictions became part of the OSS’ culture and shaped how its operational units organized to accomplish the organization’s objectives.

2. The Operational Groups

As the OSS grew into a formal unit, its responsibilities increased, and it organized into unique elements based on mission demand. In Europe, the largest of these units was the Operational Group (OG). The OGs consisted of U.S. Army French-speaking volunteers divided into two 15-man sections each with two officers and 13 enlisted men. Many of the personnel had backgrounds in combat arms and had previously served as engineers, signalmen, and medics.¹¹ The main task of the OG was to insert behind enemy lines, organize resistance elements, and conduct sabotage and subversion to cut off enemy lines of communication (see Figure 1).¹² These capabilities and missions would later be mirrored during the creation of the SFOD-A.

¹⁰ United States. War Department, *War Report of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services)* (NY: Walker, 1976), 223.

¹¹ Aaron Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1986); OSS, “Operational Groups Field Manual of Strategic Services, Office of Strategic Services,” World War II: U.S. Documents on Planning, Operations, Intelligence, Axis War Crimes, and Refugees : Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part 1: 1942-1945, Strategic Issues: Production and Assignment of War Materials, Shipping, Aircraft, Petroleum, Propaganda and Unconventional Warfare, War Crimes and Prisoners of War, Conferences, 1944.

¹² Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action*.

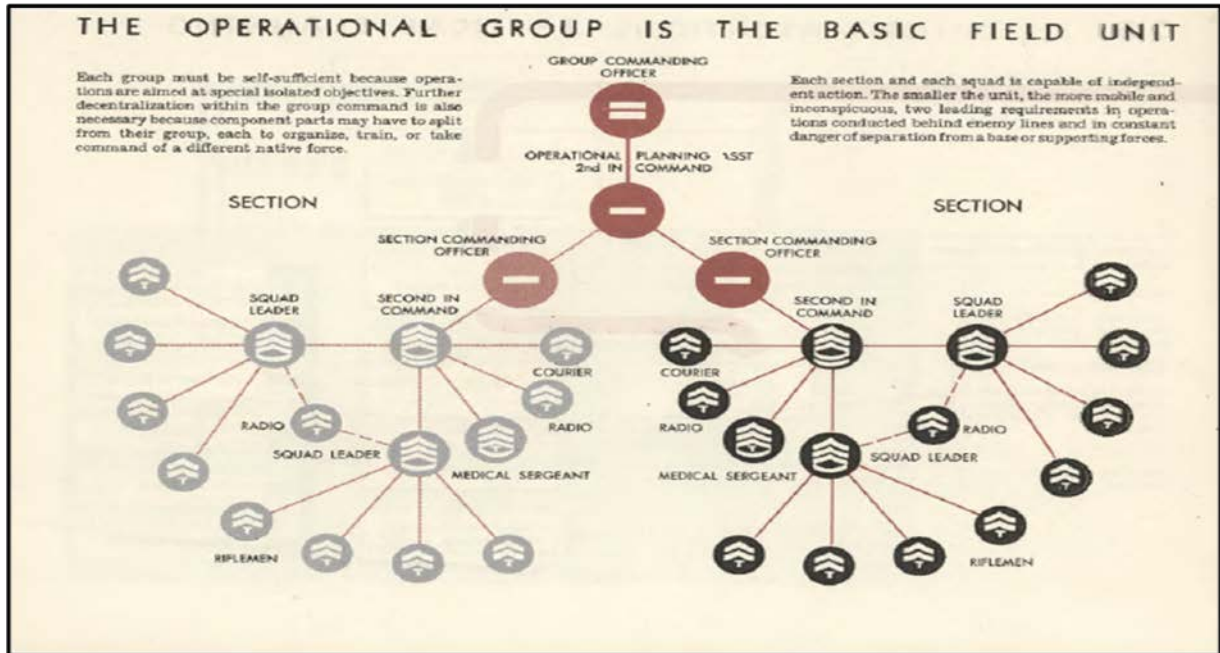


Figure 1. The OSS Operational Group structure¹³

3. Jedburgh Teams

Another element, smaller in size compared to the OGs, were Jedburgh Teams. These three-man units derived their name from the listed codename of their base in Scotland and parachuted into occupied Europe to support resistance operations in Europe.¹⁴ An important difference in the Jedburgh's capability was the requirement that each team incorporate a non-American native speaker from the assigned operational area.¹⁵ Additionally, because of their size, Jedburgh teams were not formed by a higher headquarters but instead allowed individuals to form their own unit from a pool of operators. The use of this unique unit formation technique ensured team cohesion for the units which were destined to operate deep behind enemy lines.

¹³ Office of Strategic Services, "Operational Group Command," OSS Primer, December 1944, <https://www.soc.mil/OSS/assets/operational-groups-overview.pdf>.

¹⁴ Wyman W. Irwin, "A Special Force: Origin and Development of the Jedburgh Project in Support of Operation Overlord," (*master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1991*).

¹⁵ Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets*; Irwin, "A Special Force."

4. The Office of Strategic Service; Pacific Theater Concept

While there were many successes for the OSS in Europe, there were also many failures due in large part to the organization's lack of experience.¹⁶ The OSS unit which saw perhaps the greatest success during WWII was Detachment 101 which conducted operations in Burma. Established in 1942, Detachment 101 grew from a modest 21-man force, to one that consisted of over 9,200 guerillas with over 1,000 allied servicemembers serving in its ranks throughout the war.¹⁷ Like other OSS units, Detachment 101 initially benefitted by its commander's ability to hand select personnel. These men were then trained and cross-trained for a variety of missions throughout the Pacific Theater of Operations. As noted by Troy Sacquety in his detailed account of the unit's history:

One each was involved in administration, photography, medical, research and development, secret intelligence, special funds, two in supply, three in training; while five personnel each were assigned to communications, and special operations. It must be stressed again that each of these men performed a multitude of tasks. Their duties represent the first melding of OSS functions in Detachment 101; however, that these men were in reality all from the Special Operations (SO) Branch is significant. This established from the beginning that regardless of a man's branch and training, he performed the duties deemed of the greatest need.¹⁸

As important for success as the hand-selection of candidates was the geographic benefit of the unit due to its basing proximity near the forward edge of Allied defenses against the Japanese. Whereas European OSS units generally had to infiltrate and remain in occupied territory, Detachment 101, was able to conduct short-duration penetration patrols, return, reassess, and retrain. Moreover, because Detachment 101 operated outside the main theater of operations, their operations were largely more independent and less available for misuse by right-intentioned but misguided officers. This operational familiarity, independency, and cross-training would have a lasting impact on the OSS and the future USSF.

¹⁶ Troy James Sacquety, "The Organizational Evolution of OSS Detachment 101 in Burma, 1942–1945," PhD Diss., Texas A&M University, 2008.

¹⁷ Kermit Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS (Office of Strategic Service): The Overseas Targets*, 1976, 391–92.

¹⁸ Sacquety, "The Organizational Evolution of OSS Detachment 101 in Burma, 1942–1945," 37.

B. POST-WAR DOLDRUMS FOR U.S. SOF

Following the surrender of Germany and Japan, the U.S. began to rapidly decrease the number of personnel and units within the military. Following historic precedent, SOF were some of the first units offered by Army leadership for immediate deactivation. The death of President Roosevelt six months prior to the end of WWII, left the OSS without presidential protection and on 20 September 1945, President Truman ordered the unit's deactivation. Unrelenting in his vision of the need for the OSS, Donovan protested the deactivation and, following President Truman's decision, he began a two-year lobbying campaign to reactivate the capability. The result of his effort was the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency.¹⁹ In the meantime, the military continued to purge itself of SOF reducing the United States' strategic capability outside of conventional operations.

1. Birth of the U.S. Psychological Warfare Center

Whereas the CIA owes its official creation in 1947 to the struggles of General Donovan, the rebirth of Army SOF, particularly Psychological Warfare and USSF, owe their reestablishment to the efforts of General Robert McClure. McClure had been the Chief of Psychological Warfare in the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) during WWII. Following the military's SOF purge at the end of WWII, McClure began an "aggressive letter writing campaign in 1946" extolling the virtues of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and UW.²⁰ The outbreak of the Korean War, and the communists' adept use of propaganda facilitated the precipitous return of U.S. PSYOP efforts. To facilitate the rapid return, McClure received approval to create the Special Operations Division at Smoke Bomb Hill on Fort Bragg, NC. Unsurprisingly, the new division staff was filled with respected former members of the OSS who "put their collective experiences to work" for McClure.²¹

¹⁹ Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare*, 34–35.

²⁰ Jared Tracy, "The Psychological Warfare Division, the Office of the Chief of Psychological Warfare, and the Psywar School at Fort Riley, 1950-1951," *Veritas* 7, no. 2 (2011): 26–35.

²¹ Charles H. Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring Cheap, Practical SF Training in the Post-Vietnam Turmoil," *Veritas* 14, no. 1 (2018): 103.

2. Creating the Special Forces construct

Like Donovan, McClure was untiring in his attempt to create a UW capability for the military and he recruited former OSS operators to support his initiative.²² These men, such as, Aaron Bank, Wendel Fertig, and Russell Volkmann, had extensive experience building resistance networks during WWII and formed the nucleus of McClure's staff. At Smoke Bomb Hill, the new staff began the long journey toward creating the framework for USSF. Critical to the effort was Lieutenant Colonel Russell Volckmann, who had drafted the Army's field manuals for the Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare and Combatting Guerilla Forces while assigned to the Infantry School.²³ These manuals, along with other research and analysis of guerrilla activities, provided a doctrinal grounding for the need for a specialized UW centric unit. Equally important were the real-world experiences of Volkmann and the others which made them the only experts of UW in the military at the time. These men's efforts during WWII gave them immense credibility and they were widely respected throughout the military. Although they differed in their opinion of how the proposed force should be organized, the central theme of stay-behind guerilla operations remained a constant.²⁴

Key to the development of the framework and doctrine of Special Forces were numerous engagements by Office of Chief of Psychological Warfare (OCPW) staff, to promote the Special Forces concept to the U.S. Army. These engagements included meetings between Volkmann and General Lawton Collins, the Chief of Staff of the Army. In written correspondence between the two, Volkmann succinctly described and outlined the early tenets of the OCPW's interpretation of what missions Special Forces would conduct.²⁵ Additionally, McClure's staff prepared a brief for General Taylor, the Army G-3, about the skills, capabilities, and strategic necessity of a special force.²⁶ As briefed

²² Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare*, 119–25.

²³ Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring"; Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare*.

²⁴ Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare*; Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring."

²⁵ Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare*, 122–23.

²⁶ Paddock, 126–29.

to General Taylor, the mission of UW was a way to generate additional combat power for U.S. and the NATO forces, through cooperation with indigenous peoples.²⁷ Or as noted more clearly in a training circular the mission of Special Forces was:

To infiltrate its component operational detachments, by air, sea, or land, to designated areas within the enemy's sphere of influence and organize the indigenous guerrilla potential on a quasi-military or a military basis for tactical and strategic exploitation in conjunction with our land, sea, and air forces.²⁸

Impressed with the concept, General Taylor approved the unit's creation giving the OCPW their first victory for the UW concept and enabled the creation of the first Special Forces unit, the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG).

Following Taylor's approval, the staff of OCPW organized to meet the demands associated with the new unit. Here, the OCPW began to run into issues. After a world-wide recruiting tour, Lieutenant Colonels Melvin Blair and Volckmann returned to Ft. Bragg having enticed many talented individuals to join the unit.²⁹ However, the Adjutant General's office delayed many of the Soldier's transfer requests resulting in a manning crises at the activation of the 10th SFG.³⁰

C. RECRUITMENT WOES

The slow transfer rates were due in part to a bureaucratic issue of personnel slots. While General Taylor approved the creation of the unit, there were no personnel slots available within the Army to fill it.³¹ Through coincidence, slots were found from the Army Rangers which had been activated at the onset of the Korean War, suffered shocking

²⁷ Richard. Bitzinger, *Assessing the Conventional Balance in Europe, 1945-1975*, N-2859-FF/RC (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corp., 1989), 4-7.

²⁸ Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring," 106.

²⁹ Briscoe, 104.

³⁰ Alfred H. Paddock Jr, *US Army Special Warfare, Its Origins: Psychological and Unconventional Warfare, 1941-1952* (The Minerva Group, Inc., 2002), 21; Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring," 105.

³¹ Hogan, "The Evolution of the Concept of the U.S. Army's Rangers, 1942-1983," 292-93.

casualties, and were subsequently deactivated by General Ridgeway.³² In a trend that would repeatedly plague USSF, recruitment also suffered from conventional commanders who were unenthusiastic about losing their most talented and often most experienced personnel to an unknown “special unit.” These officers went so far as to discourage volunteers and sabotage their transfer paperwork.³³ To overcome these challenges, the Army Chief of Staff, published a directive to subordinate commanders directing them to eliminate all obstacles.³⁴ With the bureaucratic issues solved, transfer rates slowly climbed as the organization grew to meet perceived operational demands.³⁵

1. The Lodge Act

One event that offered USSF a recruitment boost was the Lodge-Philbin Act of 1950.³⁶ The Lodge-Philbin Act, commonly referred to as “the Lodge Act,” was a piece of legislation introduced by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. This law was based on Lodge’s understanding of the German and Russian ability to incorporate foreign units into their militaries during WWII.³⁷ Lodge’s vision was to create a means of enlisting and mobilizing Europe’s Displaced People (DP) against the threat of communism and under the banner of a “Volunteer Freedom Corps” (VFC).³⁸ The VFC concept later evolved into the Lodge Act and allowed an initial enlistment of 2,500 unmarried, foreign volunteers into the U.S. Army.³⁹ In an attempt to rapidly boost personnel numbers the newly established USSF “allowed for over half the enlisted men to be Lodge Act recruits.”⁴⁰

³² James Stejskal, *Special Forces Berlin: Clandestine Cold War Operations of the US Army’s Elite, 1956-1990*, Kindle Edition (Philadelphia ; Oxford: Casemate Publishers, 2017).

³³ Stejskal, 380 of 3604.

³⁴ Stejskal, 380 of 3604.

³⁵ Briscoe, “Training on a Shoestring,” 105.

³⁶ Briscoe, 104.

³⁷ Charles H. Briscoe, “America’s Foreign Legionnaires: The Lodge Act Soldiers-Part I,” *Veritas* 5, no. 1 (2005): 34.

³⁸ Briscoe, 34.

³⁹ Briscoe, 34.

⁴⁰ Stejskal, *Special Forces Berlin*, 330 of 3604.

Despite the positive idea of enlisting the displaced population in Europe against Communism, the Lodge Act program was not without obstacles. First, many of the DPs were required to undergo intense background investigations by the Army's Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC).⁴¹ Due to the nature of the applicant's arrival in Western Europe, investigations took a long time due to the difficulty in investigating an applicant who conducted "street work," a common job for DP's.⁴² The process was also prolonged by the inability of investigators to verify information from emigres who had lived behind the iron curtain. Moreover, because of the "red scare," any association, or relative with links to communism were scrutinized, causing fewer candidates to arrive for initial training than anticipated.

Another challenge to the Lodge Act was the prohibition of countries from which applicants could be recruited. Restrictions on recruiting in Austria, Belgium, France, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Germany limited the potential for the Lodge Act to attain its initial enlistment goals.⁴³ Even when end strength for the Lodge Act increased to 12,500 personnel, the goal would never be realized due to the recruiting restrictions of the program.

The lack of established standards and processes through which Lodge Act Soldiers enlisted proved another challenge with the program. Many Lodge Act Soldiers processed into the Army in diverse means and one group's process was rarely the same as its predecessors.⁴⁴ The lack of standards combined with the testing, background investigations, and registration of the Lodge Act Soldiers dismayed Senator Lodge who repeatedly complained to Army officials.⁴⁵

While the Lodge Act seemed like it would be a boost USSF recruitment of individuals who had language expertise, knowledge of local areas and customs, and a desire

⁴¹ Briscoe, "America's Foreign Legionnaires: The Lodge Act Soldiers-Part I," 37.

⁴² Briscoe, 37.

⁴³ Charles H. Briscoe, "America's Foreign Legionnaires: The Lodge Act Soldiers-Part II," *Veritas* 5, no. 2 (n.d.): 29.

⁴⁴ Briscoe, 29.

⁴⁵ Briscoe, 31.

to fight communism, it only officially produced 800 soldiers.⁴⁶ Of these, only around 100 went on to serve in USSF, a number highlighted by the 22 available for duty with USSF in the first few months after the establishment of 10th SFG.⁴⁷ Even after another year of Lodge-Act recruitment effort, the total number in USSF in 1953 was only 33.⁴⁸ This number does not highlight the appeal that USSF had to foreign emigres and literature on the Lodge Act often conflates all foreign volunteers with SF Lodge-Act recruits. Had the Lodge Act not been stymied by military bureaucracy, lack of command emphasis, and inefficiency, it would have given SF a large ready-made force of language proficient and cultural experts. Instead, USSF made gradual growth which enabled organizational adaptation and development flexibility.

⁴⁶ Briscoe, "America's Foreign Legionnaires: The Lodge Act Soldiers-Part I," 34.

⁴⁷ Briscoe, 34.

⁴⁸ Briscoe, "America's Foreign Legionnaires: The Lodge Act Soldiers-Part II," 43.

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II. THE FIRST SFOD-A MODEL DURING THE BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR

A. THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

1. The Political Environment

The organizational design of the initial SFOD-A, like so many units, was heavily influenced by its environment. This environment included political and social fear of the global specter of communism, the economics of a post-WWII U.S., and the historically unique technological circumstance of the nuclear age. The combination of these factors led to a demand for a unique force that was capable of using native populations to serve as force multipliers to deter or combat communist expansion. The result was the birth of USSF and its initial mission of UW. The SFOD-A, USSF's sole tactical level unit, was specifically designed to meet the requirements of UW tasks to accomplish this mission.

USSF arrived in a political environment dominated by the U.S. policy of communist containment. While the Truman administration had naively attempted to turn a blind eye to the communists' intent, George Kennan's 1947 publication, *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, detailed communist expansionist ideology.⁴⁹ Moreover, in Kennan's publication, he outlined a containment policy which the U.S. implemented in National Security Council (NSC) 68.⁵⁰ Secretary of State Dean Acheson first voiced President Truman's policy of containment publicly on 12 January 1950. In this address, Acheson stated that U.S. containment would rely on air and naval supremacy, using the western Pacific island chain as a line of demarcation.⁵¹ However, rather than having a deterrence effect on communist expansion, this decision emboldened Stalin who gave the North Korean dictator, Kim Il Sung, approval to launch an invasion of South Korea in June 1950. President Truman, faced with the reality of Asia falling to communism, broke from his

⁴⁹ George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25 (1946): 566.

⁵⁰ John Lewis Gaddis and Paul Nitze, "NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat Reconsidered," *International Security* 4, no. 4 (1980): 164–76, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2626672>.

⁵¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York, New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 53.

island chain strategy and ordered the deployment of U.S. troops to Korea commanded of General MacArthur and with the approval of the U.N.⁵²

While MacArthur gathered his forces in Japan, the defeat of rapidly deployed and unprepared U.N. forces caused their retreat toward the Southeastern port city of Pusan. The initial problems of the war occurred partially because the piecemeal manner in which U.N. forces were deployed but also because of inter-war budget cuts and a general lack of contingency planning.⁵³ This strategic failure stemmed from U.S. political sensitivity to confront Soviet interests following WWII which created inner-service bureaucratic problems.⁵⁴ For instance, during the inter-war period, the U.S. had predominantly deployed non-combat units to South Korea in ad hoc, constantly rotated units. These units focused on internal security and developing the Republic of Korea (ROK) military.⁵⁵ However, budget cuts effectively hamstrung their efforts and denied the ROK an effective U.S. sponsored defense. Meanwhile, the Soviets created a communist North Korean government equipped with effective population control, robust propaganda, and a modernized military. As the capability of the North Koreans grew, the Soviets withdrew the bulk of their forces to the point that prior to the onset of hostilities, only a small contingent of advisors remained in place. By doing this, the Soviets maintained deniability of direct involvement in North Korea's offensive actions.⁵⁶ This provided a clear indicator of the prospect of proxy forces to enable strategic decisions which undoubtedly had an effect on U.S. decision makers when considering the development of USSF.

MacArthur's invasion and initial success penetrating North Korea, unintentionally brought the Chinese into the war and drove U.N. forces from the banks of the Yalu back to the 39th parallel. As the war ground into a stalemate, U.S. leaders began to experiment with non-typical units to enable effects to break the deadlock. Some of these non-

⁵² Gaddis, 53.

⁵³ James F. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1987).

⁵⁴ Schnabel, 23.

⁵⁵ Schnabel, 18.

⁵⁶ Schnabel, 25.

conventional options can be considered Special Operations because they were conducted by specialized units with a specific mission orientation. These efforts included actions by U.S. Army Rangers during their brief reactivation to conduct raids and harass enemy supply lines.⁵⁷ However, lack of strategic application of these forces by their conventional commanders resulted in high casualties with minimal positive effect. Additionally, the 8th Army developed a concept for a partisan unit of pro-democratic North Koreans. However, initial attempts to deploy members of the partisan unit to conduct UW behind enemy lines resulted in disaster due to the communist's detailed population control measures and the lack of prior preparation by the U.S. and ROK.⁵⁸ As a consequence, the partisan units were largely relegated to raiding operations along the North Korean coast.

2. Social Change

The weeks preceding the Korean War were perhaps some of the most hopeful in U.S. history as a sense of normalcy had settled in following the tumultuous years of WWII. In a national poll, newspaper editors were asked to respond with what news they believed the American people would most like to see. The highest responses were that the "Stalinist dictatorship had collapsed" and that "war had permanently been abolished."⁵⁹ The utopian atmosphere of stability imploded with word of the North Korean invasion and the population grimly accepted President Truman's decision to deploy the military into what many assumed was the first theater of World War III. However, unlike the Vietnam War a decade later, the vast majority of the U.S. population believed the U.S. involvement in Korea was justified. This sentiment remained throughout the war despite the cost of 34,000 U.S. personnel who died fighting.⁶⁰ Therefore, instead of focusing on the human cost, the true national fear of the nation was that military weakness had inspired the communist

⁵⁷ Robert P. Wettemann, "ARSOF in the Korean War: Part I," *Veritas* 6, no. 1 (2010): 9.

⁵⁸ While some members of 10th SFG deployed to Korea later in the war, by the time of their deployment, the fight had largely become static and they produced few tangible results. For more information on U.S. backed partisan operations during the Korean War, read: Ben S. Malcom, *White Tigers : My Secret War in North Korea* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1996).

⁵⁹ John E. Wiltz, "The Korean War and American Society," *The Wilson Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1978): 128.

⁶⁰ Wiltz, "The Korean War and American Society."

aggression and resulted in the perceived decline of U.S. hegemony.⁶¹ The stalemate fueled public perception that the might of the U.S. had faltered due to a lack of strong military leadership and President Eisenhower was elected in part due to his previous military leadership combined with his knowledge of “how to bring the Korean conflict to an early honorable end.”⁶² In other words, while the population wanted to end the Korean War, the perceived need for U.S. strength outweighed the demand. This resulted in relatively few adaptations within the military.

3. The Economic Environment

Military investment at the start of the Cold War was heavily influenced by congressional leaders who wanted to reduce the national deficit accrued during WWII. As General Omar Bradley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted in his 1949 congressional testimony, “we realize...that our nation’s economy under existing conditions can only afford a limited amount for defense.”⁶³ This sense of fiscal responsibility occupied the minds of senior military and governmental leaders up to and at the outbreak of the Korean War. As a consequence, the military was neither postured to contain nor defeat communist offensive operations.

The stalemate of the Korean War brought to light important lessons for both U.S. and Soviet decision makers about the costs and strategies for great power competition during the Cold War. For the Soviets, it demonstrated that the U.S. was willing to risk escalation to counter overt communist advances. It also demonstrated that the U.S. could be baited into costly wars that would accrue an intolerable monetary cost leading to defeat.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Wiltz, 133.

⁶² Dwight Eisenhower, speech on October 24, 1952 as cited by Robert A. Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 19.

⁶³ General Omar Bradley testimony to the House Armed Service committee as cited by John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press on Demand, 1987), 91.

⁶⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 66.

4. Technological Change

By far the greatest technological advancement of the period came with the growth of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and it increasingly became a preferred method of deterrence. The Soviet atomic test, resultant arms race deepened attachment to this method through “mutually assured destruction.” This policy came to be a cornerstone of defense for every administration that followed President Truman and President Eisenhower was no exception. Whereas President Truman had responded conventionally to communist operations, President Eisenhower, realized that conventional operations’ costs had the potential to bankrupt the treasury. Consequently, President Eisenhower’s foreign policy, which was called “The New Look,” downplayed conventional deterrence and relied heavily upon the nuclear option to provide “massive retaliation.” As noted by Kenneth Osgood, Eisenhower’s “experience, combined with the awesome destructive power of nuclear weapons, convinced [him] that general war should be avoided at all costs.”⁶⁵ To this end, outside of “massive retaliation,” the chief tenet of the “New Look” policy was to enable the “free community to be willing and able to respond vigorously at places and means of its own choosing” through advisory missions.⁶⁶ “The New Look” policy forced the military to downsize its land and naval conventional capability while increasing its aerial atomic and Special Operations capability, particularly psychological warfare.⁶⁷ For USSF, this policy represented a “boom” in funding and, as will be discussed, precipitated mission growth and organizational adaptation.

B. MISSION AND TASKS

While all organizational capability adaptations of the SFOD-A have been heavily influenced by the environment of the time, the initial model was also heavily influenced by internal military politics. As noted, the suspension of Army Ranger units provided USSF

⁶⁵ Kenneth A. Osgood, “Form before Substance,” *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 3 (2000): 405–33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00225>.

⁶⁶ Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations dated 12 January, 1954 as cited by Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 248.

⁶⁷ Osgood, “Form before Substance.”

with the necessary personnel slots to facilitate the manning of the new force. The deactivation of the Army Ranger units also demonstrated the pervasive belief by military leaders that the elite capability of the Rangers could be developed quickly in an emergency and required no peacetime units.⁶⁸ In contrast, the OCPW staff realized that UW operations were longer in duration requiring preparation during peacetime for wartime employment. Accordingly, USSF initially remained hyper-focused on its mission of UW to ensure there was no misconception and consequent misuse as a commando force by the conventional army. USSF's operating concept was ubiquitous throughout the early years and transcended all ranks. As noted by Sergeant First Class Dick Shevchenko "our mission was to go behind enemy lines, gather up guerrillas, and train them."⁶⁹

When Colonel Bank took command of the first USSF unit, the 10th SFG, the OCPW staff was still diligently developing a model for the force's employment into various theaters of operation. While the Korean War provided a short-term option, its conventional nature provided few opportunities for USSF to prepare the environment for UW operations. Consequently, the OCPW staff focused their initial organizational design on employment in the European Theater. As the staff had various backgrounds and experience in UW, there was some debate on which European WWII model the unit should follow and each staff member advocated primarily based on their individual experience.⁷⁰ In the end, the OCPW staff settled on the OSS Jedburgh concept as the capability model and the OGs as the size model for the SFOD-A.⁷¹

C. ORGANIZATION AND CAPABILITIES

As individuals transferred to the 10th SFG at Fort Bragg, the work of organizing subordinate units began to take shape. The initial naming construct was borrowed from the Jedburgh model of "Functional Area Teams" or FA Teams and was adapted for each

⁶⁸ Darren Sapp, *Aaron Bank and the Early Days of US Army Special Forces*, Kindle Edition (Collins & Halsey Publishers, 2011).

⁶⁹ Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring," 107.

⁷⁰ Briscoe, 106; Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets*, 172.

⁷¹ Sapp, *Aaron Bank and the Early Days of US Army Special Forces*.

echelon of command within 10th SFG. For instance, the tactical level unit kept the FA designation while the company and battalion level units were referred to as Functional B (FB) and Functional C (FC) Teams, respectively. According to the unit's Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) dated 1952, the 10th SFG consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) and three Special Forces Battalions or FCs. Each FC had five companies (FBs) and each FB had 10 FAs (see Figure 2).

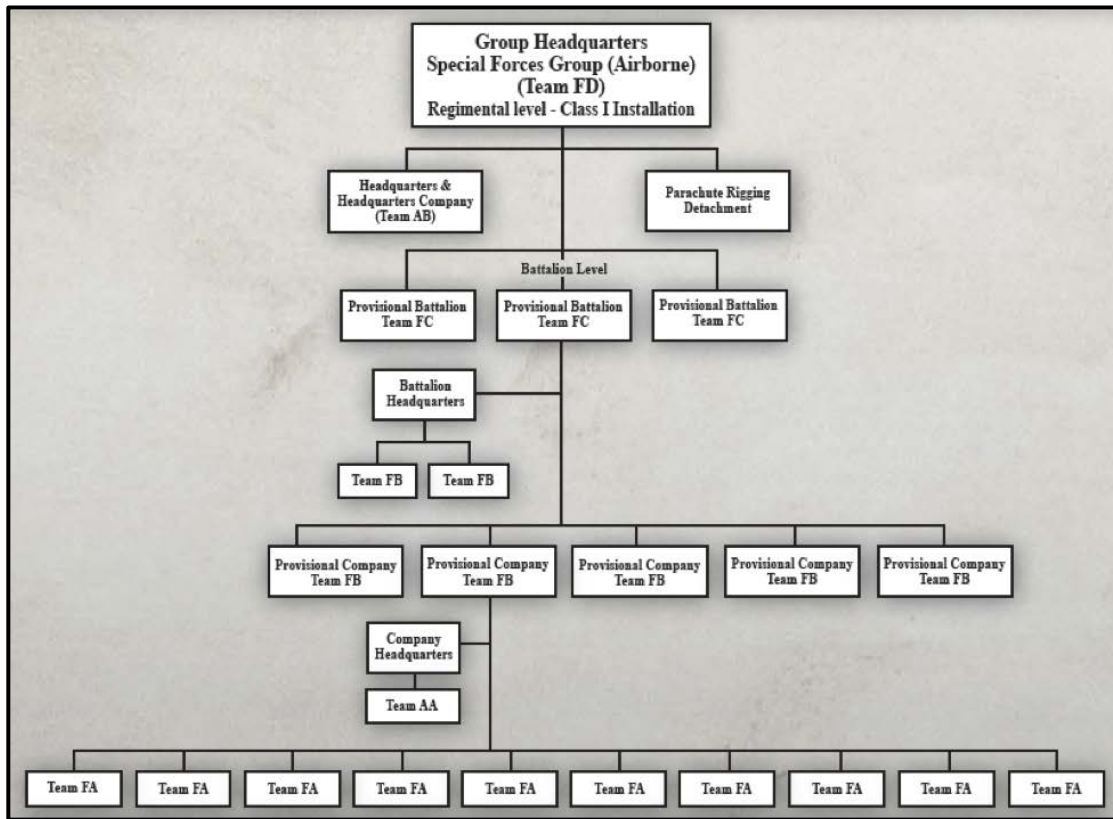


Figure 2. 10th SFG organizational chart.⁷²

The responsibility for each echelon of command was broken up according to the level of guerilla unit that was being advised. For instance, the FA Teams were responsible for training a company size guerilla force and FB Teams were responsible for training a

⁷² Eugene G. Piasecki, "The A-Team Numbering System," *Veritas* 5, no. 4 (n.d.): 39; Piasecki, "The Psywar Center Part II: Creation of the 10th Special Forces Group," 110.

battalion level unit. Meanwhile, the FCs provided logistics while the SFG Headquarters was responsible for the development of a guerilla area command.⁷³

As the organization of the SFG took shape, the manning of each respective unit began to evolve. For FA teams, the predecessor of the SFOD-A, the first manning attempt mirrored the OSS OG model and consisted of 15-man teams (two officers and 13 enlisted).⁷⁴ SFG leaders though feared that the size too closely mirrored that of a Ranger section which could precipitate misuse. The size was therefore adjusted to a 12-man team.⁷⁵ Like their Detachment 101 and OG progenitors, each team was capable of splitting into smaller elements based on the environment they were operating within.⁷⁶

Individual capabilities known as Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) within the FA Teams was an evolving concept. Colonel Bank's experiences in occupied France shaped the initial FA teams' specialties and, like their WWII predecessors, every team would cross-train in mission required skills. The two most concrete specialties in Colonel Bank's vision were the medics and the radio operators.⁷⁷ As the training was further refined for the expected operating environment, communication and medical skills were added to enable operations deep inside enemy zones of occupation. Later, capabilities such as weapons, demolitions, survival, and tactics were taught to all personnel on the FA teams.⁷⁸

Initially, there was no established school for the USSF training. Nevertheless, the leadership and staff of the new 10th SFG, worked to establish an initial training regimen worthy of the new unit and its mission. Training in Guerrilla Warfare was facilitated by the Army's Psychological Warfare Department and individuals received an initial 8-week

⁷³ Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring," 106.

⁷⁴ Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets*, 172,176, 176–77.

⁷⁵ Stejskal, *Special Forces Berlin*.

⁷⁶ Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets*, 176.

⁷⁷ Bank, 189.

⁷⁸ Bank, 189.

course on basic partisan warfare.⁷⁹ Special considerations for officers and enlisted who could not attend the course forced 10th SFG to create an internal individual skills program which supplemented the 8-week course.⁸⁰

Individual MOS training followed the Guerrilla course, which prepared each member of the FA team in his skill. Although Colonel Bank's opinion of specialty skills consisted of medical and radio expertise; the SF hopefuls trained many of the skills learned and used by Allied forces during WWII. These added capabilities such as small unit tactics and intelligence gathering operations enabled the activities of the new unit.⁸¹ Outside of collective training. Select individuals also received additional training to enable the insertion of teams behind enemy lines. This training included, rough terrain parachute insertion, provided by a smokejumper school in Montana, and waterborne insertion, provided by a small-boat operators course in Virginia.⁸²

Despite the novelty of the initial training the new USSF recruits received, their skills were watchfully and carefully evaluated to ensure the strictest professionalism and standards were enforced. Assessment of the new skills of the SFG fell to the training staff of unit's headquarters and the SFG Operations Officer developed evaluations for FA, FB, and FC teams. Field Training Exercises such as FREE LEGION and LEGIONNAIRE RALLY tested the newly trained teams' individual and collective skills.⁸³ Colonel Bank was ever-present during these evaluations and often opted to personally talk to a team to ensure they understood the demands of their respective missions during a UW operation.⁸⁴ The initial training regimen culminated in an evaluation of the entire SFG during FTX CLEO held at Camp Castro in the Chattahoochee National Forest.⁸⁵ Upon completion, 10th SFG was certified and prepared to conduct its UW mission.

⁷⁹ Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring," 106.

⁸⁰ Briscoe, 107.

⁸¹ Briscoe, 106–7; Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets*, 188–95.

⁸² Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring," 107.

⁸³ Briscoe, 107.

⁸⁴ Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets*, 200.

⁸⁵ Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring," 107.

Shortly after 10th SFG's certification, President Eisenhower ordered its deployment to Germany. This deployment was based on several events which coincided to create a ripe atmosphere for a UW operation. Following the death of Joseph Stalin in March of 1953, U.S. leaders sensed a feeling of change within the Soviet Union and sought opportunities to exploit the transition.⁸⁶ This sense of vulnerability also reached the German population living under Soviet oppression who rose in riotous revolt against their communist oppressors. Though discounted by the Soviets and communist German Democratic Republic as minor and fractured, the labor strikes and nation-wide rebellion constituted roughly ten percent of the population.⁸⁷ President Eisenhower, sensing an opportunity to create wider rebellion at low political and economic cost, ordered the deployment of the 10th SFG.

Upon arrival to Germany, the 10th SFG represented a trained and certified UW force capable of meeting the President's desired goal. However, officers at United States Army Europe command were unable to include the unit into theater plans.⁸⁸ Consequently, although certified in UW and deployed to take advantage of the East German uprising, the 10th SFG was sidelined while the Soviets crushed the insurrection with tank armies.

D. CONCLUSION

Despite significant lobbying effort by the OCPW to establish a UW unit, it was changes in the environment, particularly the financial and human costs of conventional deterrence in Korea, that drove U.S. leaders toward alternative means of combatting communist expansion. While USSF was created, organizationally designed and deployed with the required capability to conduct UW in Europe, the inability of military leaders to see the significance of left it struggling for relevancy. As a consequence, USSF adapted its capability toward other missions that supported the global defense against communist aggression.

⁸⁶ Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953 - 1961* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005), 31.

⁸⁷ Gareth Dale, "The East German Rising of June 1953," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 11, no. 2 (2003): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965156032000167207>.

⁸⁸ Stejskal, *Special Forces Berlin*, 406; Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets*, 210–13 of 3604.

III. MODEL II: VIETNAM AND THE WARS OF LIBERATION

A. THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

The first model focused on the environment and missions which demanded the capabilities required by the initial SFOD-A and determined its organizational design. The second model focuses on the environment and adaptations that USSF undertook as it was sidelined from strategic employment in Europe and instead found work in Southeast Asia. Like the first model, the capabilities of the SFOD-A remained heavily influenced by the environment and missions of the regiment as it transitioned focus to the Pacific. This model demonstrates USSF's adaptation from a specialized niche force to one capable of conducting full spectrum Special Operations.

1. The Political Environment

The political environment influenced changes in missions and the organization of SFOD-As during the lead up to and execution of the Vietnam War. A major contributing factor of this was the U.S. policy of containment which was carried by every President during the Cold War. While the initial containment policy focused on reacting conventionally to communist offensives, the policies of President Eisenhower and Kennedy focused on enabling defense by enabling partner nations' efforts. To meet this strategic goal, the U.S. military increased advisory missions as a means of furthering partner nation defense efforts. While USSF in Europe seemed to fade out of utility, new USSF units formed to meet the demand.

Although USSF was still held in dubious regard by many high-ranking military leaders, the ability of the newly formed USSF units to expound upon their original mission highlighted the units as flexible alternatives to large footprint conventional forces. The adaptability of these units for various Special Operations missions meshed well within President Eisenhower and Kennedy's respective strategies and gained USSF relevancy.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 3; Chalmers Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard: Inside Special Forces, 1953-1963* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 6.

Moreover, the rapid transition from its core mission task of UW left an indelible mark on the culture of USSF which is still evident today.

The mid to late 1950s saw much change to U.S. national foreign policy regarding what some called the “Wars of National Liberation and Liberation Fronts.”⁹⁰ As policy demanded smaller force sizes to save fiscal and manpower cost, advisory missions for USSF grew. The initial name for these missions were Mobile Training Teams (MTT) and they became a common mission for USSF in Asia. The MTT mission in Vietnam began under President Eisenhower in 1957 and rapidly gained additional authorities as the security situation in that country deteriorated and economy-of-force operations expanded.⁹¹

Another environmental challenge for USSF units in Vietnam came from the after-effects of the Korean War stalemate. As noted by Andrew Krepinevich, many senior U.S. Army leaders accustomed to winning conflicts, like WWI and WWII, “adopted a never again” attitude toward the limited objectives imposed on them by the civilian leadership during the Korean War.⁹² This sense of limiting was felt within the public and political arenas and was echoed in Presidential policy.⁹³ However, without a strategy which matched means and ends, the U.S. population and military were largely unprepared for the requirements of winning an “irregular war.”

Correspondingly, France’s post-WWII delay of decolonialization and independence of Asian states created an environment primed for the spread of communist ideology. Even when forced through U.S. and international pressure, France’s effort in assisting the transition of several of its Southeast Asian colonies failed, and U.S. support was increasingly required.⁹⁴ Guided by the domino theory, which demanded the defense

⁹⁰ Wars of National Liberation and Liberation Fronts were common terms used during this time to explain Communist movements designed to overthrow Western-style governments. For more information, see Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard*, 10.

⁹¹ Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1985), 35.

⁹² Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 16.

⁹³ Krepinevich, 17.

⁹⁴ Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 16.

of every state from communist aggression, the U.S. began to increase its support to vulnerable governments throughout the world. As noted, this necessitated the deployment of SFOD-As to serve as MTTs providing the training, advisement, and equipping of forces.⁹⁵ While training conventional forces was not a prevailing concept of employment at USSF's inception, the professionalism and training of the SFOD-As made them the force of choice for OPERATION WHITESTAR. The purpose of OPERATION WHITESTAR was to create "shock forces" to combat communist insurgents through Direct Action (DA) strikes.⁹⁶ While USSF MTT missions were largely successful, U.S. Army senior leadership felt that USSF was too independent and later cancelled the program.⁹⁷ Despite the cancellation of WHITESTAR, SFOD-As gained valuable skills and experience which were carried over during the Vietnam War.

A substantial increase in strength and employment for USSF came following the election of President Kennedy whose departure from the concept of "massive retaliation" espoused by President Eisenhower made USSF the premiere force for his foreign policy. Adding emphasis to President Kennedy's point was the best-selling 1959 book *Uncertain Trumpets* by General Maxwell Taylor which concluded that "massive retaliation limited U.S. options to nuclear deterrence."⁹⁸ Instead of continuing the massive retaliation policy, President Kennedy developed the "Flexible Response" policy which gave the U.S. deterrence options at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels by rebuilding and refocusing the military.

President Kennedy's early view of warfare was fueled by his understanding of the growth of communist "Wars of Liberation." As noted in his speech to the graduating class of West Point on June 6, 1962:

⁹⁵ Stanton, 17.

⁹⁶ Chalmers Archer Jr's book *Green Berets in the Vanguard* recounts Chalmer's experiences during this initial early period of USSF in SE Asia. He recounts several deployments which discuss in detail the various objectives and initiatives USSF undertook in that region. Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard*.

⁹⁷ Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 24.

⁹⁸ Maxwell Davenport Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*. (New York: Harper, 1959).

Korea has not been the only battleground since the end of the Second World War. Men have fought and died in Malaya, in Greece, in the Philippines, in Algeria and Cuba and Cyprus, and almost continuously on the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. No nuclear weapons have been fired. No massive nuclear retaliation has been considered appropriate. This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin -- war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him.⁹⁹

USSF's subsequent adoption of counterinsurgency (COIN) into its core mission tasks gained traction as President Kennedy's refocus on the military intensified. At this point, USSF had already executed several MTTs in Southeast Asia. Like OPERATION WHITESTAR, USSF was again the force of choice for the military's initial effort in Vietnam.

As security in Europe stabilized with tank armies facing off with one another along the East-West German border, the U.S. began to increasingly focus on the Pacific. Linked to this shift was the pervasive belief by U.S. leaders that the European powers should decolonize the region and permit the indigenous populations the right of self-determination. This concept was problematic though as noted by the European leaders who believed the U.S. "failed to recognize that the continuation of colonial rule, or at least influence, was the only thing preventing the emergence of states hostile to the West."¹⁰⁰ Undeterred, the U.S. continued to pressure the Europeans to decolonize while indigenous communist nationalists began violent revolts.

In Vietnam, colonial grievances led to The First Indochina War as France struggled against communist forces desiring to free Vietnam from its unwanted host. U.S. leaders had, in accordance with the containment policy, offered assistance to the struggling French with the provision that France allow the Vietnamese the right to self-determination. However, colonial interests prevailed and the French, unwilling to accept U.S.

⁹⁹ J. F. Kennedy, "Remarks at West Point (June 6, 1962)," *Speech, Transcript at [Http://Millercenter.Org/President/Kennedy/Speeches/Speech-5766](http://Millercenter.org/President/Kennedy/Speeches/Speech-5766)*, 1962.

¹⁰⁰ Damien Fenton, *To Cage the Red Dragon SEATO and the Defense of Southeast Asia, 1955-1965* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 21.

preconditioned support, began to lose the war. While the U.S. ultimately acquiesced and provided materiel aid, the decision came too late to change the outcome and the French suffered a major defeat at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1953 and consequently lost Vietnam.¹⁰¹

The Geneva Accords of 1954, which the U.S. helped organize, finalized the conclusion of the First Indochina War and split Vietnam along the 17th parallel. Fearing the vulnerability of the neighboring of Laos and Cambodia, U.S. leaders determined that “any further territorial loss to Communist expansion in SE Asia was inevitable unless a regional defense alliance under U.S. leadership could be established.¹⁰² With President Eisenhower’s approval, the U.S. created a plan for an America-led security framework for the region which included nations such as the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines.¹⁰³ This security framework, took its design from the NATO construct and included provisions for collective defense between all signatories.¹⁰⁴ Although many were happy with the defense pact, it did not take long for U.S. leaders to realize that “they were not dealing with a mirror image of the security situation in Europe” and that additional U.S. forces would be required to maintain regional stability.¹⁰⁵

2. Social Change

Much of the U.S. population initially supported Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy’s policies in Vietnam. The relatively few numbers of troops deployed to the country under the MTT concept, left the greater U.S. population relatively unaffected by the military support. This ignorance resulted in very little societal change throughout the initial years of U.S. deployments. However, President Johnson’s 1965 decision to escalate U.S. involvement began to generate profound societal change. As noted by Lunch and Sperlich, from 1966–1967 “increasing numbers of people began to tell pollsters that

¹⁰¹ Fenton, 25.

¹⁰² Fenton, 25.

¹⁰³ Fenton, 26.

¹⁰⁴ Fenton, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Fenton, 28.

American involvement in the Vietnam War was a mistake.”¹⁰⁶ This downward trend of American public sentiment strained the relationship between the policymakers and the military. Moreover, the loss of public support for the war generated additional restrictions on the means U.S. forces could use to execute operations in order to limit U.S. casualties. This resulted in U.S. military leaders’ continual attempts to bring the war to a swift close through large conventional operations. These efforts affected USSF’s mission focus and organizational requirements throughout the war.

3. The Economic Environment

While the cost of the Vietnam War in blood, drove rapid societal change at home, equally costly was the financial burden. Unlike the human cost, the full burden of financial capital was slowed by the incremental increases in the war but was nevertheless debilitating over time.¹⁰⁷ While the initial buildup of the military for participation in the conflict generated an increase to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) the length of the war ultimately demanded increased spending.¹⁰⁸ The combination of the government “blowout [of the] budget deficit” combined with “an expansionary monetary policy” led to a rise in inflation by the close of the war.¹⁰⁹ This slow path toward recession produced little change during the war but had a long-term effect following its conclusion.

4. Technological Change

Adding to the complexities of the environment during this time period was a significant technological advancement; the helicopter. Born out of the inter-service rivalry between the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Army since its breakup after WWII, the helicopter gave rise to the concept of air-mobile units. This concept promised a variety of increased

¹⁰⁶ William L. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, “American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1979): 22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/447561>.

¹⁰⁷ George C. Herring, “America and Vietnam - the Unending War,” *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 5 (1991): 116.

¹⁰⁸ Institute for Economics and Peace, *The Economic Consequences of War on US Economy* (New York: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2011), http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-Economic-Consequences-of-War-on-US-Economy_0.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ Institute for Economics and Peace, 11.

capabilities including, a more flexible response force, faster reaction times, improved tactical mobility, increased early detection, a quicker counter-attack reserve, and a force “more likely to surprise and eradicate guerrilla forces.”¹¹⁰

The first test of the air-mobile concept came by the Army’s first air-mobile unit, the 1st Cavalry Division. In this “test,” the 1st Cavalry Division was not only able to launch forces and artillery into an enemy stronghold but reinforce and resupply them all via helicopter.¹¹¹ Recognizing that increased mobility enabled offensive operations, a U.S. advantage and concept it frequently gravitates toward, the U.S. military strategy throughout much of the war focused on area denial and clearance operations.¹¹² In essence, military leaders saw air-mobility as the tool to break from the stalemate of the Korean War by enabling rapid movement into denied areas. As a consequence, conventional military units were often focused on clearance operations while USSF, being resupplied by air, could perform economy-of-force operations in rural areas.

Another technological advancement which influenced events throughout the Vietnam War came in the form of news as it transitioned from paper reporting to television as a means to recount the war’s progress. In the advisory years of the Vietnam War (1954–1961), media coverage of Vietnam or events in Southeast Asia rarely occurred.¹¹³ With little to spark the interest of the American public, journalists focused elsewhere for newsworthy events. Troop escalation and increase in combat casualties brought additional attention and televised news broadcasts focusing on the war increased.¹¹⁴ According to a Trilateral Commission of 1975, television journalism’s ability to quickly report on the news with graphic photographs or videos on the horrors of war represented a new source of

¹¹⁰ “U.S. Army Tactical Mobility Requirements Board Final Report, 20 August 1962. :: General Military History,” 14–15, accessed August 13, 2019, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll11/id/1689>.

¹¹¹ Harold G. Moore, *We Were Soldiers Once -and Young : Ia Drang, the Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

¹¹² Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977).

¹¹³ Michael Mandelbaum, “Vietnam: The Television War,” *Daedalus* 111 (1982): 158.

¹¹⁴ Mandelbaum, 159.

national power.¹¹⁵ This concept was reflected by Richard Nixon who stated, “news media had come to dominate domestic opinion about its purpose and conduct [of the war].”¹¹⁶ This constant influence by the media increased resentment of the war, contributed to the lack of American public resolve, and fueled war protests effecting how the war was executed.

B. MISSION AND TASKS (1950–1973)

The aforementioned factors played a contributing role in the way the military executed their missions. As the environment shifted, the missions asked of USSF during Vietnam can be categorized under the four separate missions of COIN, Direct Action (DA), Foreign Internal Defense (FID) and Special Reconnaissance (SR). Although the original mission of USSF was UW, the growth of communist backed insurgencies led to additional missions and demanded adaptation.¹¹⁷ While some units operating in Southeast Asia, such as the 14th Special Forces Operational Detachment, did include temporary missions to “seek out, train, and support men capable of becoming effective guerillas in Vietnam,” this mission paled in comparison to the larger programs under the conventional strategy employed in Vietnam.¹¹⁸

As part of the larger COIN strategy in Southeast Asia, the U.S. Army initially employed MTTs and advisory groups to provide military assistance through equipment, training and combined operations.¹¹⁹ These programs spanned several countries including Thailand, Taiwan, and Vietnam, and Indonesia while necessitating the creation and rapid

¹¹⁵ Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, “The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission,” ed. Bibiana Muñoz Clares, *Sociología Histórica: Revista de Investigación Acerca de La Dimensión Histórica de Los Fenómenos Sociales*, no. 1 (New York: New York University Press, 1975): 311–29.

¹¹⁶ Daniel C. Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3.

¹¹⁷ Not to say that during the Vietnam war there were not units capable or conducting some level of UW For more on such forces read: Stanton, *Green Berets at War*.

¹¹⁸ Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard*, 30.

¹¹⁹ Archer, 60.

deployment of the 1st SFG.¹²⁰ Not only did the MTTs assist foreign governments by strengthening host-nation military capabilities, they also demonstrated that USSF was capable of operating alongside a multitude of foreign forces. This allowed detachments to engage within the culture of their host nation, a skill critical to any foreign interaction.¹²¹

In Vietnam, USSF missions morphed over time as the U.S. military commitment to the security of the peninsula increased. By far, one of the longest enduring programs USSF participated in during the conflict was the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG). The CIDG was a concept started by the CIA's Military Assistance Advisory Group's Combined Studies Division (CSD) to enable disaffected South Vietnamese rural peasants to defend their own areas while denying the communists safe haven. By design, this program received CIA funding but used USSF to recruit, train, and equip the locals.¹²² The concept was largely successful and effectively created friendly safe areas as a thorn in the side of the communists' operations in South Vietnam.¹²³

The CIDG program marked a shift from the typical training or advisory missions of the same period. In essence, the program was more akin to the UW mission of USSF with slight modifications. Instead of going deep behind enemy lines, SFOD-As would be in a host nation's "free territory" persuading local minority groups from joining the communists and enabling their own internal security. Selected as the first test village, the "Buon Enao Experiment" in Darlac province was solely under the control of the CSD and not the Vietnamese government.¹²⁴ The basic concept of the CIDG program was to obtain approval from village chiefs and elders to adopt the program, swear allegiance to the Republic of Vietnam, and establish a security force and defensive structure in the village.¹²⁵ After two-and-a-half months of work in Buon Enao, the initial experiment

¹²⁰ Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 1; Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard*, 59.

¹²¹ Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard*, 59–60.

¹²² Eugene G. Piasecki, "Civilian Irregular Defense Group," *Veritas* 5, no. 4 (2009): 20.

¹²³ Piasecki, 8.

¹²⁴ Piasecki, 20.

¹²⁵ Piasecki, 24.

concluded with such success that the provincial chief requested the program expand to neighboring villages.¹²⁶

Part of the success of the early CIDG program was that it belonged to the CIA which had fewer bureaucratic challenges when it came to organization, funding, and support for various civic projects than the military did.¹²⁷ The result was an early success of the program and 1962 brought with it an increase in the CIDG program throughout Darlac Province. The program initially expanded to include 40 additional villages within a 15 km radius of Buon Enao but by the end of the year, the program encompassed over 200 villages.¹²⁸ The increased activity brought with it a greater demand for SFOD-As which necessitated the creation of the Headquarters United States Army Special Forces Vietnam (USASFV).¹²⁹ By the close of 1962, USSF had increased in strength to “530 USSF soldiers serving on four B-Teams and twenty-eight SFOD-As throughout Vietnam.”¹³⁰

As USSF’s strength in Vietnam increased, the U.S. military in country reorganized into the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV). MACV’s leaders then pressured the CIA to pass control of the CIDG and USSF to the new command.¹³¹ After relenting, the CIA and MACV co-sponsored OPERATION SWITCHBACK to transfer complete control of the CIDG program to MACV. This transfer changed several of the essential components of the program.¹³² First, instead of being a U.S. centric effort, the responsibility for the camps reverted to South Vietnamese control following the completion of training and the establishment of security. This led to lapses in support by the South

¹²⁶ Piasecki, 24.

¹²⁷ Christopher K. Ives, *US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam* (New York: Rutledge, 2007), 21, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203964941>.

¹²⁸ Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971* (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Army, 1973), 23–25.

¹²⁹ Piasecki, “Civilian Irregular Defense Group,” 24.

¹³⁰ Piasecki, 24.

¹³¹ Ives, *US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam*; Robert W. Jones Jr., “A Team Effort: Special Forces in Vietnam June-December 1964,” *Veritas* 3, no. 1 (2007); Piasecki, “Civilian Irregular Defense Group,” 25.

¹³² Ives, *US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam*, 24.

Vietnamese Government for the villages.¹³³ Additionally, instead of a population centric approach focusing on minority groups, SWITCHBACK changed the focus of CIDG operations to a more offensive minded strategy.¹³⁴ Instead of local area security, the CIDG began targeting communist infiltration routes into Vietnam.¹³⁵ This demanded half of the security force from villages to at all times, be out on patrols actively seeking out the communists.¹³⁶

The new shift toward an offensive strategy under the COIN effort changed the mission for USSF in Vietnam. Several of these changes included: support for offensive operations of conventional forces with Apache Forces, the modification of the CIDG mission to include placing camps in contested areas along infiltration routes, and the creation of the MIKE force as a DA mobile strike force to conduct offensive operations against the enemy.

Apache Forces were formed in response to ambushes of helicopter Landing Zones (LZs).¹³⁷ To combat this threat, MACV ordered the USASFV to respond using indigenous forces to augment their operations. 5th SFG's concept was simple; take ethnic Chinese anti-communist Nungs assigned to CIDG companies, provide them with advanced training and deploy them as 10-man reconnaissance units to scout LZs prior to large, air-mobile operations.¹³⁸ Once the air-mobile unit was on the ground, the Apache Force fell under the incoming commander until completion of the operation. Although short lived, all the Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ) developed this capability. The cost of these operations to the CIDG program was drastic as the indigenous force losses through attrition while working in unfamiliar terrain produced a negative response in future CIDG programs.

¹³³ Ives, 24.

¹³⁴ Ives, 24.

¹³⁵ Ives, 28.

¹³⁶ Ives, 28.

¹³⁷ Kenneth Finlayson, "'Colonel Mike' The Origins of the MIKE Force in Vietnam," *Veritas* 5, no. 2 (2008): 24.

¹³⁸ Finlayson, 24.

USSF and the CIDG program suffered additional losses as the focus of the military's effort transitioned. Instead of providing local area security and civic projects for the villages the CIDG locations became bases for strike operations in their respective areas.¹³⁹ To facilitate this shift, by late 1964, CIDG camps were moved along the borders of Laos and Cambodia. Once again, this meant that rather than focusing on the population, USSF expanded in regions where there was either no population or where the population was so primitive that they avoided all contact with "outsiders."¹⁴⁰ Left without a willing population from which to source the CIDG, the mayors of Danang and Hue provinces began to press teenage hoodlums into service. This led to a precipitous decline in the capability of USSF and the CIDG, which degraded the original concept.¹⁴¹

As the communist insurgency gained momentum in South Vietnam, USSF and their CIDG counterparts isolation left them exceedingly vulnerable. Losses from several attacks from 1964–1965 at Ben Cat and other CIDG bases near the dangerous "iron triangle" demanded USSF create quick reaction forces capable of rapidly reinforcing besieged SFOD-As.¹⁴² To fulfill this requirement, MACV created the Mike Forces.

Mike Forces, like their Apache Force and CIDG predecessors, recruited, trained, and equipped the indigenous population to augment USSF operations, in this case, Quick Reaction Forces (QRF). As the capability of these units grew, they became an invaluable asset as they were able to save numerous outposts that would have otherwise been overrun. Conventional force commanders began to see the Mike Forces as a rapidly deployable force that could be moved to hostile areas that were too risky for other South Vietnamese or U.S. conventional forces. This became the method of employment of the MIKE forces throughout the rest of the Vietnam war and allowed "USSF and their 'stikers' to aggressively seek out and destroy the enemy."¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971*, 34.

¹⁴⁰ Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), 114.

¹⁴¹ Simpson III, 115.

¹⁴² Finlayson, "'Colonel Mike' The Origins of the MIKE Force in Vietnam," 21.

¹⁴³ Finlayson, 26.

C. ORGANIZATION AND CAPABILITIES

The missions for USSF evolved through the Vietnam period, however the structure of the SFOD-A changed little; especially with regard to MOS capabilities. There were, however, several experiments that the 14th Special Forces Operational Detachment (SFOD) attempted in the late 1950s which included a 16-man detachment as a model for the SFOD-A. This unit was commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel, the Executive officer was a Major, the Operations Officer was a Captain, and contained a Master Sergeant in charge of 12 senior Sergeants.¹⁴⁴ All members of this unit had to apply and were thoroughly screened prior to execution of FID tasks throughout the Pacific. Under this model the 14th SFOD conducted several deployments to Thailand, Taiwan, and Vietnam. However, with the creation of 1st SFG, the members of this unit became the cadre for the new unit and the concept faded away as it was determined that FID missions, outside of combat, required no organizational adaptation of the SFOD-A.¹⁴⁵

The introduction of USSF into Vietnam and the development of the CIDG program initially required little organizational adaptation for the SFOD-A. While the pilot teams that made initial contact with village elders generally consisted of an USSF medic and CIA counterpart, the execution of the CIDG program was ultimately filled by SFOD-As.¹⁴⁶ As USSF was short personnel, it was not uncommon for CIDG programs to be filled with incomplete SFOD-As. For example, in the experiment at Buon Enao the SFOD-A113 medic and a CIA representative made initial contact prior to bringing the six remaining men of the detachment in (see Figure 3).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard*, 27.

¹⁴⁵ Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard*.

¹⁴⁶ Piasecki, "Civilian Irregular Defense Group," 20–24.

¹⁴⁷ Piasecki, 22–23.

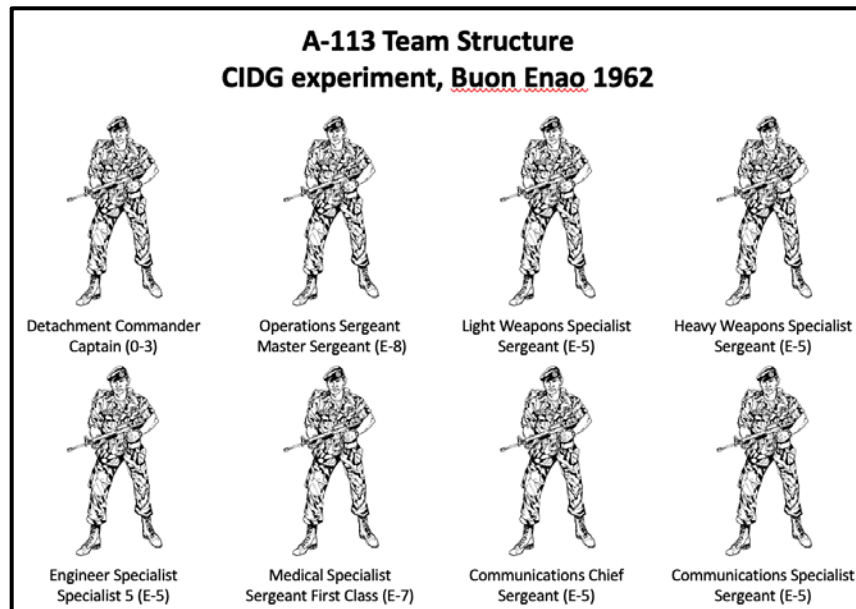


Figure 3. The structure of the original SFOD-A tasked with the experimental CIDG mission¹⁴⁸

The success of the CIDG program and subsequent expansion necessitated additional SFOD-As and marked the first field adaption of its organizational structure. Through experimentation, it was determined that the ideal force structure for the CIDG program was a Vietnamese Special Forces unit and a SFOD-A operating as a split-team.¹⁴⁹ The focus of the U.S. personnel was to advise and assist the Vietnamese Special Forces to accomplish what the initial USSF teams had done in other locations.¹⁵⁰ In practice, this concept was not always possible as some SFOD-As were not partnered with a Vietnamese Special Forces unit.¹⁵¹

As the military increased its role in Vietnam, it expanded offensive operations and USSF followed suit. Unlike the CIDG program which initially focused on local security and remained small, the Mike Forces were more formalized into the military construct.

¹⁴⁸ Piasecki, "Civilian Irregular Defense Group."

¹⁴⁹ Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971*, 25.

¹⁵⁰ Kelly, 25.

¹⁵¹ Kelly, 28.

Generally comprised of 185 indigenous personnel, the Mike Forces were organized in a battalion with a headquarters, three companies, and a weapons platoon (see Figure 4). Similar to the CIDG program, the SFOD-A assigned to the Mike Force supervised recruiting and conducted training and advisory operations within the battalion.¹⁵² This model for the MIKE force proliferated throughout Vietnam as a means to actively pursue the enemy.

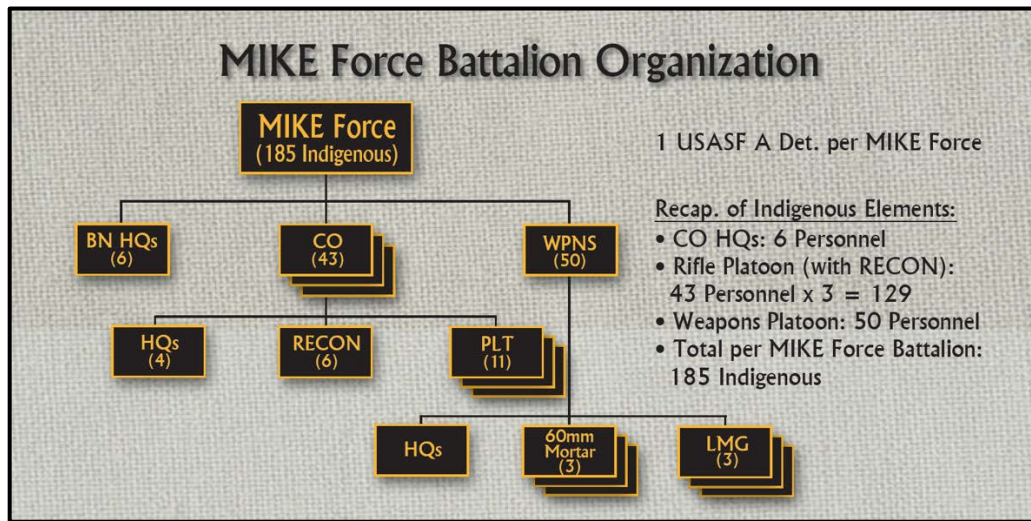


Figure 4. The Mike Force Battalion Organization¹⁵³

As the MIKE force dominated the USSF effort in Vietnam, the CIDG program began to take a back seat because population centric programs did not mesh with the strategic means of prosecuting the war at that time. Driven by a precarious political environment which insisted on quantifiable metrics of success, the U.S. military focused on body counts and areas cleared instead of the previous population centric metrics. This lack of a singular focus prevented doctrinal acceptance of SFOD-A adaptation that had occurred during the height of the CIDG program. The most pervasive of these adaptations

¹⁵² Finlayson, “Colonel Mike’ The Origins of the MIKE Force in Vietnam,” 23–26.

¹⁵³ Finlayson, “Colonel Mike’ The Origins of the MIKE Force in Vietnam.”

had been the addition of two billets per SFOD-A to allow for an imbedded Civil Affairs (CA) specialist and a Psychological Operations (PSYOP) officer (see Figure 5).

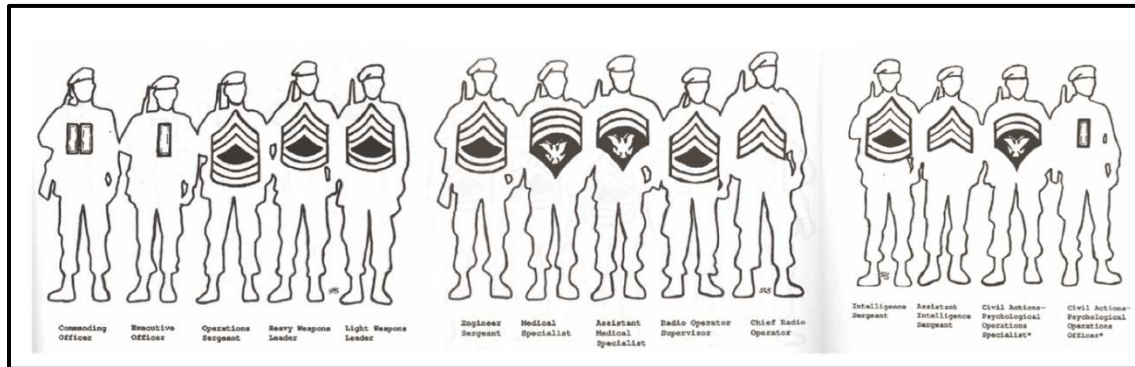


Figure 5. SFOD-A with Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations imbed¹⁵⁴

Experience gained from years of population engagement demonstrated the importance of having a full time CA and PSYOP personnel on the detachment. Stanton states that while the role of CA or PSYOP may not always be present on a detachment, it was however, “the primary duty of one man.”¹⁵⁵ Within the CIDG camps, civic action programs focused on programs such as medical care, agriculture, and animal husbandry expertise but also focused on training local Vietnamese on the skills necessary to become self-sufficient.¹⁵⁶ The additional slots for CA and PSYOP at the detachment level also changed the structure of the USSF battalions CA and PSYOP functions and combined them under the S-3 operations for renewed emphasis.¹⁵⁷ The success of many of the early CIDG camps hinged on the fact that the civic action programs accompanied the security programs within the village. This established a “social contract” between the people, the SFOD-As

¹⁵⁴ Shelby L. Stanton, *U.S. Army Special Forces A-Team Vietnam Combat Manual* (Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 1988), xiii; Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets*, 154–55.

¹⁵⁵ Stanton, *U.S. Army Special Forces A-Team Vietnam Combat Manual*, 120.

¹⁵⁶ Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets*, 151–53.

¹⁵⁷ Simpson III, 155.

and the government and turned large numbers of indigenous Vietnamese into local self-supporting security forces.

D. CONCLUSION

The period encompassing the Vietnam War was unique for the relatively new USSF and required some capability adaptation and organizational modification of the SFOD-A. The vast diversity of the missions and the dynamic nature of the environment required several adjustments to USSF's original construct. Although the changes USSF made were temporary in nature, those teams which incorporated CA and PSYOP in conjunction with their village defense program tended to be more successful.

Recognizing that the character of warfare was changing, the U.S. initially sought to employ population-centric military capabilities under COIN which it did not possess. Because counterinsurgency is population based, a broad range of population-centric capabilities were required at the detachment level. The shift towards a more offensive attitude in operations post-SWITCHBACK shifted the objective of USSF's presence away from the population. While strike operations are a necessary requirement, especially in a COIN environment, it can be viewed as the easy and measurable way to demonstrate success despite short-term gains. The popularity of the strike companies, and their proliferation, demonstrate continued attempts to fight offensively.

The integrated capabilities at the detachment level under the CIDG program might be useful for the future environment where interconnectivity and other globalization factors will require a different kind of capability beyond those which USSF currently possesses. Whereas the temporary changes to USSF were ad-hoc at best, limited wars, where indirect actions dominate all aspects on the battlefield and beyond it, will require change in USSF structure to meet the demands placed on the detachment by the environment.

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IV. BEYOND VIETNAM AND TO THE WAR OF TERROR

A. THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Military change, and especially organizational military change, in times of relative peace, is rarely, if ever a fast process. Instead, change within military bureaucracies often occurs over several decades and is broadly shaped by the environment of the time.¹⁵⁸ This chapter scopes the history of the SFOD-A detachment construct from the U.S. departure of Vietnam to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). By doing this, one can understand how the shifting environment, in terms of political, technological, social, and economic change, drove missions, focus, and organizational adaptation of the SFOD-A. Given that USSF has undertaken a vast array of missions since Vietnam, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to categorize all of the regiment's missions. Instead, this chapter will seek to highlight several missions which best characterized the efforts of USSF and drove organizational adaptation during the selected period.

1. The Political Environment

UW is by nature, a political decision. Consequently, USSF has, perhaps more than any other military organization, either contracted, adapted, or expanded depending upon presidential administrations' desired means of combatting threats. Such has been the environment since Vietnam, as the national desire to distance the prestige of the country from the failures dictated defense strategy and funding. Shifts in strategy and funding affected the military as a whole after Vietnam but its consequences shocked the core of USSF. One important consequence was an ebb and flow of USSF's appetite to conform and adapt to conventional military demands.¹⁵⁹ This malleability is not relegated to the immediate post-Vietnam period but instead can be seen in the assignments of SFOD-As over the past four decades.

¹⁵⁸ Suzanne C. Nielsen, *An Army Transformed: The U.S. Army's Post-Vietnam Recovery and the Dynamics of Change in Military Organizations*, Letort Papers, no. 43 (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2010), 3.

¹⁵⁹ Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action*, 159.

The first post-Vietnam defense strategy modification actually occurred while the U.S. was still embroiled in the conflict. Faced with an increasing anti-war movement, and growing national distaste for the draft, President Nixon abandoned the “two-and-one-half war” defense strategy (meaning the military must be prepared to fight two conventional wars and one irregular war simultaneously) and adopted the “one-and-a-half war” defense strategy.¹⁶⁰ This departure meant that rather than supplying troops to defend allies and partners globally, the U.S. would provide materiel aid and economic support.¹⁶¹ For USSF, which, like the rest of the military, was suffering from weak leadership and numerous ethical scandals, the transition threatened the organization’s existence. While President Nixon’s implementation of this strategy was cut short by his resignation, President Ford not only kept the policy but also its authors who supervised implementation.

For the military, the shift in strategy meant that while the U.S. was withdrawing from Vietnam, it would downsize the force.¹⁶² USSF’s contemptuous relationship with the conventional Army, due to its “absence from the cannon of strategic theory,” was consequently starved of funding.¹⁶³ Conventional Army officers, seeing no future in the unique force, further dissuaded talented personnel from joining.¹⁶⁴ By the late 1970s, the confluence of these two factors nearly put USSF out of business. Seeing the proverbial writing on the wall, “the vast majority of officers and non-commissioned officers with [USFF] experience and knowhow fled into retirement or the conventional army.”¹⁶⁵ This exodus left USSF in a state of organizational paralysis and resulted in attempts to rebrand

¹⁶⁰ Previous administrations formulated the two-and-a-half-war strategy upon the concept that the U.S. would need to defend Europe and Korea conventionally while also defending Southeast Asia through irregular means. This necessarily linked China and Russia into a monolithic threat in strategists minds. The one-and-a-half war strategy cognitively dissected the monolith and created opportunities. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 220.

¹⁶¹ Richard Nixon, “Informal Remarks in Guam with Newsmen,” *The American Presidency Project*, July 25 (1969).

¹⁶² Nielsen, *An Army Transformed*.

¹⁶³ Alastair Finlan, *Special Forces, Strategy and the War on Terror: Warfare by Other Means*, 28 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 12.

¹⁶⁴ Stanley A. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Portfolio, 2014), 33.

¹⁶⁵ Charles M. Simpson III and Robert B. Rheault, *Inside the Green Berets: The First Thirty Years, a History of the US Army Special Forces* (New York: Presidio Press, 1983), 219.

the organization as a reconnaissance and direct-action force offering commanders enhanced but nevertheless conventional capability. As Mark Boyatt describes, “Special Forces became a very expensive (in rank and training) conventional force. The unconventional operations aspect [of USSF] remained only barely viable.”¹⁶⁶

President Carter’s foreign policy attempted to create a more peaceful global environment by creating détente with the Soviet Union while promoting human rights internationally. This led to bi-lateral talks with the Soviets focused on limiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons that became known as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I and II. President Carter predicated the SALT talks upon the Soviet’s limiting their expansion. However, as the Soviets proved throughout the 1970s, the communists had no interest in restraint. Not wanting to repeat another Vietnam, President Carter shifted his defense policy to protect U.S. vital interests, specifically those in the Persian Gulf and Europe through conventional deterrence. This era of “limited goals” further constrained USSF’s role as there was “no taste among executive branch policymakers for anything like unconventional involvements by the military.”¹⁶⁷

The Reagan administration was in some ways a double-edged sword for USSF. On the one hand, the administration sought to roll back Soviet expansion, spoke openly about supporting anti-communist insurgencies, and increased funding for and the size of SOF units.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, the administration was mostly unable to penetrate the military’s “traditional close focus on the Soviet conventional threat in Europe.”¹⁶⁹

Moreover, the administration’s reluctance to support anti-communist insurgencies with troops limited its goals to supplying military aid. Left with a national policy that supported irregular warfare but military leadership and a political environment that did not, USSF throughout the 1980s concentrated on conforming into the conventional apparatus.

¹⁶⁶ Mark D Boyatt, *Unconventional Operations Forces of Special Operations* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 1993), 8.

¹⁶⁷ Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action*, 159.

¹⁶⁸ Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, “Anti-Communist Insurgency and American Policy,” *The National Interest*, no. 1 (1985): 91–96.

¹⁶⁹ Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action*, 184.

In many ways, USSF distanced itself from its core, mission of UW and instead focused on “raiding and deep reconnaissance for large conventional operations.”¹⁷⁰ This is not to say that unconventional and irregular operations and training did not occur and succeed, particularly under the revamped MTT construct, but rather that the focus was based upon tactics most useful in conventional battle.¹⁷¹

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, remaining political interest in UW evaporated. Except for the Persian Gulf War, the predominance of U.S. military endeavors throughout the 1990s was in peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance operations. These operations, combined with sweeping budget cuts under the Clinton administration, should have necessitated a conventional military adaptation toward a lighter, more expeditionary force.¹⁷² However, once again, “conventional wisdom” prevailed and the military writ large remained focused on conventional warfare. This predominance of focus came to a climax in the days and weeks following the 9–11 attacks, as senior ranking military leaders recommended courses of action to President Bush that were conventional minded but politically unsuitable.¹⁷³

September 11, 2001 brought USSF and UW back in vogue because it “offered significant military advantages, emphasized partnerships to reduce U.S. casualties, and reduced international perception of the U.S. killing Muslims.”¹⁷⁴ Moreover, the unprecedented speed with which SOF, particularly SFOD-As, were able to oust the Taliban elevated the participants to hero status and bolstered the administration’s political

¹⁷⁰ Adams, 169.

¹⁷¹ Richard Shultz, “The Low-Intensity Conflict Environment of the 1990s,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 517 (1991): 124.

¹⁷² Alan Tonelson, “Superpower without a Sword,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 166–80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045630>.

¹⁷³ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown : A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 358.

¹⁷⁴ Paul Wolfowitz to Donald Rumsfeld, “Using Special Forces on ‘Our Side’ of the Line,” Memorandum, September 23, 2001, 9/11 Documents, The Rumsfeld Papers, <http://papers.rumsfeld.com/library/page/911-documents>; Donald Rumsfeld to George Bush, “Strategic Thoughts,” Memorandum, September 30, 2001, <http://papers.rumsfeld.com/library/page/911-documents>.

standing.¹⁷⁵ As a consequence, USSF emerged in 2002 from Afghanistan as triumphant victors and the vindicators of American sovereignty. This desire to “fight smart,” was replicated during the invasion of Iraq, and SFOD-As deployed en masse to conduct UW as well as a variety of other missions in support of the 2003 invasion.

Following the defeat of the Iraqi military and subsequent “de-Baathification,” the situation in Iraq degraded into anarchy as rival insurgent groups battled for supremacy of the country. The chaos of Iraq and the associated increase in U.S. casualties represented a significant political risk for the Bush administration. As noted by Eichenberge, Stoll, and Lebo, President Bush’s approval rating dropped “about one percentage point for every 100 deaths of American personnel in Iraq.”¹⁷⁶ To overcome this, the military leadership abandoned longstanding precedent and began to report the ratio of U.S. deaths vs. insurgents killed. This framing of the deteriorating situation served to demonstrate “measures of success” and were designed to decrease the impact of individual servicemember deaths’ on the U.S. population.¹⁷⁷ From 2004 until 2007, when General Petraeus took command of the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNFI), the military, including USSF, conducted DA centric CT operations while continually providing the media with body-count statistics reminiscent of the Vietnam War. Operations in Afghanistan mirrored the DA focused approach as the Taliban insurgency gained momentum.

2. Social Change

Entertainment has affected military investment as artists depict hyperbolic examples of SOF as either rogues who have gone “full native” or counter-terrorists who can accomplish the impossible. While entertainment can be seen as a reflection of the society’s perception of SOF, it can also drive the military’s vision of itself at present and

¹⁷⁵ Richard C. Eichenberg, Richard J. Stoll, and Matthew Lebo, “War President: The Approval Ratings of George W. Bush,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6 (December 2006): 783–808, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706293671>.

¹⁷⁶ Eichenberg, Stoll, and Lebo, 788.

¹⁷⁷ William A Boettcher and Michael D Cobb, “Echoes of Vietnam?: Casualty Framing and Public Perceptions of Success and Failure in Iraq,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6 (2006): 833, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706293665>.

what it should be in the future. Moreover, entertainment and war futurists have recently coincided in their predictions of future environments. As Sean McFate describes: “Washington’s visions of future war look like they came off a Hollywood set [and] come in three flavors: nihilists, patriots, and technophiles.”¹⁷⁸ Nihilists predict future Mad-Max-style dystopias, patriots predict environments where military strength wins the day, and technophiles predict a technology-driven future with sentient machines controlling warfare.¹⁷⁹ All of these predictions miss the mark but have effectively driven strategy and investment in technology within the military.¹⁸⁰ At times, the technological focus has left the military with a capability gap regarding population based operations in support of strategic goals.

3. The Economic Environment

As is the case with any unit, funding has always played a pivotal role in the organization of USSF. As previously noted, before the adoption of the Nunn-Cohen amendment, USSF was profoundly affected by disproportionate funding cuts compared to the conventional military. In the post-Vietnam environment, this also led to significant reductions in force, which “destroyed USSF operational readiness as effectively as grapeshot.”¹⁸¹ To overcome the perceived lack of value, USSF focused on becoming proficient at individual and collective tasks that fit into the greater construct of warfare as envisioned by the conventional military at the time. This was particularly true prior to the Nunn-Cohen amendment when USSF’s focus centered upon DA and SR operations in support of the AirLand Battle operating concept.

4. Technological Change

Without a doubt, the greatest technological change since the U.S. departure from Vietnam has been the proliferation of computers. While computers and technology

¹⁷⁸ Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder*, First edition (New York: William Morrow & Co, 2019), 12.

¹⁷⁹ McFate, 12–14.

¹⁸⁰ McFate, *The New Rules of War*.

¹⁸¹ Briscoe, “Training on a Shoestring,” 26.

profoundly impacted the daily lives of the global population, in terms of the U.S. military, it gave rise to the concept of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). By “shifting the balance between offense and defense,” the RMA concept meshed well with the U.S. military’s propensity for offensive and conventional operations.¹⁸² This contributed to a belief within the military that technological superiority would ensure battlefield success and the DoD focused heavily on expensive technological innovations.¹⁸³ As described by H.R. McMaster, the RMA “took a very technological approach to the very complex human and political problem of war.”¹⁸⁴ Accordingly, the U.S. predominantly focused its modernization efforts in the 1990s on the tenets of the RMA: “precision strike and delivery, information warfare, dominant maneuver, and space (systems and/or operations).¹⁸⁵ For USSF, this meant that while the conventional military focused on defeating conventional opponents, the non-conventional role for USSF expanded.

The speed of news dissemination also contributed to the adaptation of USSF from its traditional role of UW. This growth was initially seen in the Vietnam War and, as noted, it had a huge impact on how that conflict was prosecuted. Following the Vietnam War, the media began to focus on terrorism as an emerging global trend of violence. Consequently, as terrorist attacks began to occur against the U.S. abroad as well as at home, American interest steadily grew. This is not to say that terrorism grew because of interest but rather that the growth of the media provided terrorists with a global audience and made terrorism’s impact larger than before.

In the 1970s, the growth of terrorism generated particular attention during the Ford administration as the Soviets began to promote its use as a new form of proxy warfare.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Thierry Gongora and Harald Von Riekhoff, eds., *Toward a Revolution in Military Affairs: Defense and Security at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*, Contributions in Military Studies, no. 197 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

¹⁸³ McFate, *The New Rules of War*, 43.

¹⁸⁴ H.R. McMaster, A Conversation with Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, December 4, 2014, <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20141204-a-conversation-with-lieutenant-general-h-r-mcmaster>.

¹⁸⁵ Gongora and Von Riekhoff, *Toward a Revolution in Military Affairs*, 141.

¹⁸⁶ Neil C. Livingstone and David Halevy, *Inside the PLO: Covert Units, Secret Funds, and the War against Israel and the United States* (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1990), 243.

In May 1976, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld published a memo entitled “Terrorism” which highlighted the “concern within the Government over the difficult problem.”¹⁸⁷ The high-profile Israeli rescue of hostages in Entebbe led to even greater interest in the military for Counterterrorism (CT) operations. For USSF, which was held in “precarious value” at the time, CT represented an opportunity for renewed relevancy.¹⁸⁸

By 1979, the military had gone from having no CT forces to several “full-time” units and even more “semi-pros” from across the services.¹⁸⁹ The failed attempt to rescue American hostages held in Iran in 1980, and the subsequent Holloway Commission Report, highlighted several deficiencies of SOF that contributed to the failure. As a consequence, Congress was primed to enact legislation to address the problems that had become rampant throughout SOF. President Reagan’s inauguration and his “peace through strength” foreign policy further set the conditions for sweeping change within the Defense Department.

Despite the findings of the Holloway Commission, which highlighted service parochialism as a factor that led to the failure of the Iran-Hostage rescue mission, the military remained mostly unchanged in terms of support to SOF. However, failed and near-failed operations as part of the U.S. invasion of Grenada grew political interest and necessitated further congressional inquiry.¹⁹⁰ After conducting a two-year study, which included a review of SOF, Senators Goldwater and Nichols introduced legislation to end the rampant parochialism and force necessary jointness within the services.

While the Goldwater-Nichols Act produced organizational change within the military, SOF remained subject to financial restriction dependent upon the service chiefs’

¹⁸⁷ Rumsfeld as cited in: Forrest L. Marion, *Brothers in Berets: The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics, 1953-2003* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2018), 123.

¹⁸⁸ Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1997), 7.

¹⁸⁹ Sean Naylor, *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015).

¹⁹⁰ *United States Special Operations Command History: 20 (1987-2007) Proven in the Past, Vigilant Today, Prepared for the Future*, 20th anniversary ed., USSOCOM History (MacDill AFB, FL: U.S. Special Operations Command, 2007).

vision for the force. Consequently, USSF continued to struggle for relevancy in the military's new operational design: AirLand Battle. Seeing this, Senators Nunn and Cohen introduced legislation which created a four-star combatant command for all of SOF. "Additionally, the legislation created an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, a coordinating board for low-intensity conflict within the National Security Council, and a new Major Force Program (MFP-11) for SOF (the so-called 'SOF checkbook')." ¹⁹¹ In 1987, Congress passed this legislation and for the first time protected USSF from funding and personnel cuts by giving SOF the same level of representation as other combatant commands.

B. MISSION AND TASKS

Since Vietnam, USSF has had a variety of missions ranging from elite commando operations to UW in support of national objectives. These missions, driven by the environmental factors, necessarily demanded capability adaptation within the SFOD-A. The variety of these missions though resulted in a force more capable of executing ad hoc capability adaptation while decreasing the potential long-term changes that would more specifically enable UW operations.

With the departure of the U.S. military from Vietnam, "Pentagon service staffs declared acronyms such as COIN and UW to be 'bad words.'" ¹⁹² As a result of this lack of enthusiasm for traditional USSF operations, USSF sought new avenues to display relevance within the national defense apparatus. ¹⁹³ In the late 1970s, the growth of terrorism provided USSF with such an opportunity. For a time, some USSF units concentrated exclusively on conducting CT operations. This capability requirement was so prevalent that it even affected "Detachment Berlin," the regiment's most fully capable and

¹⁹¹ *United States Special Operations Command History*, 7.

¹⁹² Briscoe, "Training on a Shoestring," 26.

¹⁹³ Hy S. Rothstein, "A Tale of Two Wars: Why the United States Cannot Conduct Unconventional Warfare" (PhD, diss., Tufts University, 2004).

mission-focused UW element. The result was mission competition, meaning that USSF units began to give up training time to prepare for CT rather than UW.¹⁹⁴

With the realization of the need for a National CT unit, USSF seemed to policy makers to be the likely unit from which to create the force. Under the direction of General Edward Myer, Colonel Charlie Beckwith, an experienced USSF officer, began organizing an elite DA-focused unit.¹⁹⁵ Colonel Mountel, the 5th SFG(A) commander at the time, was unimpressed with Beckwith's vision and advocated for a parallel unit with a greater focus on SR and clandestine activities and owned by USSF.¹⁹⁶ The unit Mountel created came to be known as "Blue Light," and although it was only active for a short period of time the members went on to create what would later be called the Special Forces Advanced Reconnaissance Target Analysis and Exploitation Techniques Course (SFARTAETC), a course still active today.¹⁹⁷

Despite being effectively forced out as the national CT force, CT remained one of USSF doctrinal tasks but was no longer the focus mission. The military's adoption of the AirLand Battle operating concept effectively refocused the Army toward high-intensity conflict. Left without political backing for UW or CT, USSF found itself increasingly willing to "play ball with the services" and throughout the 1980s, the regiment adopted mostly conventional missions such as DA and SR in support of the new AirLand Battle concept.¹⁹⁸

The AirLand Battle concept, was conceived by General Starry in 1977 but largely implemented in the 1980s and was formulated upon two assumptions. The first was that the Army could not withstand another protracted fight like the one in Vietnam.¹⁹⁹ The second was that conventional war could be fought and won against the Soviets in Europe.

¹⁹⁴ Stejskal, *Special Forces Berlin*, 1939 of 3604.

¹⁹⁵ Charlie A. Beckwith, *Delta Force* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

¹⁹⁶ Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action*, 162.

¹⁹⁷ Stejskal, *Special Forces Berlin*, 1911 of 3604.

¹⁹⁸ Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action*, 159.

¹⁹⁹ John L. Romjue, *The Army of Excellence. The Development of the 1980s Army* (Fort Monroe, VA: Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1993), 15.

The latter of these assumptions was based on the Israeli Army's ability to defeat Soviet-style opponents during the Yom Kippur War by using advanced U.S. weapons.²⁰⁰ Consequently, General Starry's operating concept focused on defeating a Soviet invasion of Europe by concentrating on winning the first battle.²⁰¹ This transition of thought from a protracted war to one of massive conventional battle left little room for typical USSF missions.

During the Persian Gulf War, the AirLand Battle concept was put on display as conventional Army units produced one of the finest examples of a Jominian "battle of annihilation" in history. American citizens at home were, for the first time, awed by the accuracy of airstrikes through video images distributed by the military from the nose cones of guided bombs. Moreover, the technological capability gap between ground forces enabled victory in battle despite incidents where U.S. forces faced a numerically superior opponent.²⁰² The consequence of the 100-hour-long blitzkrieg had an enduring effect on the minds of military theorists throughout the 1990s and, for many, confirmed the advent of a RMA.

The Persian Gulf War both exemplified USSF's capability to support AirLand Battle through conventional support to high-intensity operations such but also began a slow revival of USSF irregular warfare capability. As stated by General Tovo, "Special Forces conducted a wide range of missions during the Gulf War, with varying degrees of effect on the overall campaign. The majority of these activities fell into four broad categories: coalition support, combat search and rescue (CSAR), SR, and DA."²⁰³ While three of the activities of CSAR, SR, and DA can widely be seen as a result of the 1980s focus within USSF, coalition support, can be seen as an activity more closely related to a traditional USSF task. This task ultimately necessitated the deployment of 109 Coalition Support

²⁰⁰ Romjue, 9.

²⁰¹ U. S. Army, *FM 100-5 Operations* (Department of the Army (US), 1977).

²⁰² Douglas A. Macgregor, *Warrior's Rage: The Great Tank Battle of 73 Easting* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009).

²⁰³ Kenneth E. Tovo, *Special Forces' Mission Focus for the Future* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1995), 17, <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA309816>.

Teams (CST) from the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 5th SFG(A), to hold together what General Schwarzkopf considered his center of gravity: the coalition.²⁰⁴ While assigned in this role, USSF teams not only trained the pan-Arab force but also provided conventional commanders with “ground truth” of coalition force capabilities.²⁰⁵ The proliferation of coalition operations in support of U.N. mandates throughout the 1990s repeatedly demanded USSF to perform this role.

The reclamation of Kuwait and the defeat of the Iraqi military brought an end to Operation Desert Storm. However, with encouragement from the allied forces, Iraqi Shia and Kurdish populations rose up in revolt against Saddam Hussein.²⁰⁶ Although the Iraqi military was defeated, it was far from destroyed. Consequently, Saddam Hussein turned his military loose on the rebels who were hopelessly overmatched by Iraqi armor and continuously attacked by helicopter gunships. Faced with nightly broadcasts of Iraqi brutality, the Bush administration, with U.N. approval, acted to stop what was sure to become a genocide. Almost immediately, the U.S. began supplying aid via airdrops to the displaced Kurds in what would become the most massive aerial delivery of aid since the Berlin Airlift.²⁰⁷ Members of the 1st Battalion, 10th SFG(A), who had been deployed to Northern Iraq during the war to provide CSAR capability, were once again called upon. Beginning in April 1991, just one month after the Kurdish uprising, these members entered Northern Iraq, to meet with Kurdish leaders and to coordinate aerial aid.²⁰⁸ The demonstrated success of USSF to conduct this type of operation made it the “go-to” for Humanitarian Assistance (HA) operations throughout the 1990s.

USSF deployments throughout the 1990s saw four-fold increases as the conventional Army struggled between budgetary constraints and the need to continue to

²⁰⁴ N.M. Cowling, “It Doesn’t Take a Hero; GEN H. Norman Schwarzkopf - the Autobiography,” *Scientia Militaria* 25, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5787/25-1-267>.

²⁰⁵ United States Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress: Pursuant to Title V Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization and Personnel Benefits Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-25)*. (Department of Defense, 1992).

²⁰⁶ Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action*, 247.

²⁰⁷ Adams, 247.

²⁰⁸ Adams, 247.

modernize the force.²⁰⁹ However, as noted, the prevailing strategic thought of the 1990s was dedicated to the RMA, which saw the technological edge demonstrated by U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf War as a vision for the future.²¹⁰ This vision predicted that wars could be fought and won through the application of firepower from the air and sea onto land. In essence, and despite indications to the contrary, the military remained focused on high-intensity warfare, effectively allowing USSF to play a more significant role in countering irregular threats as it was intended to do.

By the close of the 1990s, the reputation of USSF had recovered from the Vietnam stigma and it was seen as the “go-to” force when strategic effects were required. This was demonstrated in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks when “the shock of 9/11 failed to provoke originality or imagination” from conventional Army leadership.²¹¹ Faced with courses of action which emphasized kinetic strikes from afar with minimal to no “boots on the ground,” President Bush opted to use USSF and CIA teams to link up with Afghan tribesmen and provide intelligence for the approaching armada of airpower.²¹² For the first few months in Afghanistan, USSF was able to accomplish multiple goals including facilitating the union of many tribes against the Taliban, the removal of the oppressive regime from power, and providing limited humanitarian assistance. These activities enabled the creation of what would become the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA).

Although the U.S. removed the Taliban from power, the subsequent decades of fighting proved the insurgents’ capability to reform and regain momentum while attacking coalition forces and destabilizing the GIROA. To combat this threat, USSF’s focus throughout the initial years of the conflict centered on DA raids with pro-GIROA

²⁰⁹ James Kitfield, “New World Warriors,” *Government Executive*, November, 1995, 39.

²¹⁰ Sean M. Maloney and Scot Robertson, “The Revolution in Military Affairs: Possible Implications for Canada,” *International Journal* 54, no. 3 (1999): 445, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40203405>.

²¹¹ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 358.

²¹² George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (Crown, 2010), 191; Wolfowitz to Rumsfeld, “Using Special Forces on ‘Our Side’ of the Line,” September 23, 2001.

militias.²¹³ With pressure from the international community, these activities were later curtailed and replaced with efforts to build the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP).²¹⁴ However, the resurgence of the Taliban demonstrated that the enemy-focused strategy could not succeed and required that the U.S. and GIRoA concentrate on local security. While several programs were attempted, Village Stability Operations (VSO) eventually became the consummate operation for SFOD-As in Afghanistan.

The VSO program was begun in 2009 and paired SFOD-As with local villages to capitalize on the Pashtunwali concept of *arbakai* or local militia.²¹⁵ While this operation was similar in form to previous USSF efforts with pro-GIRoA militias, the difference was in focus. Rather than attacking the Taliban, VSO, like its Vietnam CIDG predecessor, concentrated its efforts on the population. This indirect approach to COIN fit in well with the 2007 joint COIN Field Manual and consequently received support from the military leadership. As the concept was refined, VSO maintained focused on four tenets of successful COIN operations: Shape, Hold, Build, and Expand.²¹⁶ Although these operations varied in their ability to create stability and link villages back to the government in Kabul, the concept nonetheless consumed the predominance of USSF's effort in Afghanistan from 2010–2014.

The early success of USSF in Afghanistan boosted USSF's credibility within the joint force, and many of the SFOD-As that participated in the invasion of Afghanistan were again called upon for the invasion of Iraq. As Linda Robinson notes, USSF "had led the conventional military to appreciate what they could do. Whereas they had been restricted to a small set of missions in the first Gulf War, General Tommy Franks, the Central Command four-star in charge of Operation Iraqi Freedom, was willing to entertain any

²¹³ Mark Moyar, *Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police* (MACDILL AFB, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2014), 6.

²¹⁴ Moyar, 6.

²¹⁵ Moyar, 3.

²¹⁶ Ty Connett and Bob Cassidy, "Village Stability Operations: More than Village Defense," *Special Warfare* 24, no. 3 (2011): 23.

proposal they made.”²¹⁷ In what would become the most massive deployment of Western SOF in history, SFOD-As conducted a “very broad” array of missions during the invasion of Iraq.²¹⁸ Whether it was UW in Northern Iraq with the Kurds or DA and SR in Western Iraq to find and destroy SCUD launch sites, USSF time and again demonstrated its capability to execute tactical level operations with operational and strategic impacts.²¹⁹

While it took the Taliban years to develop an insurgency model in Afghanistan that could destabilize the country, the anarchic environment in Iraq following the invasion proved to be fertile ground for Sunni and Shia insurgent groups. The resultant civil war, combined with political risk for the Bush administration, necessitated USSF to take part in the enemy-centric COIN strategy. While USSF teams conducted a variety of missions throughout the country, perhaps the operation with the most significant long-term impact was the creation of the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Force (ICTF), which would eventually grow into the Division-sized Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS).

As noted in David Witty’s seminal work on the history of the CTS, in December 2003, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld mandated the creation of an Iraqi counterterrorism unit.²²⁰ USSF’s inherent ability to develop indigenous populations into fighting units and experience in (what had become) FID, made it the best candidate to execute the directive.²²¹ Beginning in early 2004, USSF chose individuals from across religious groups, trained them in Jordan for 98 days, and returned them to Iraq to conduct combined CT operations with USSF.²²² For a short time, USSF’s efforts to create an Iraqi

²¹⁷ Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 243.

²¹⁸ Michael Smith, *Killer Elite: The Inside Story of America’s Most Secret Special Operations Team* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 252; Charles H Briscoe, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad: Army Special Operations Forces in Iraq* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC History Office, 2006), 80.

²¹⁹ Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos*; Smith, *Killer Elite*, 252.

²²⁰ David Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2015), 6.

²²¹ Glenn D. Furbish et al., *SIGIR 11-004 Iraqi Security Forces: Special Operations Force Program Is Achieving Goals, but Iraqi Support Remains Critical to Success* (ARLINGTON, VA: Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, 2010), 1.

²²² Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*.

counterterrorism unit were broken into two disparate battalions: the ICTF battalion and the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC). However, in May 2004, USSF was directed to combine these battalions under the First Iraqi Special Operations Brigade (ISOF). The combination of these units under one banner, as well as the integration of support and reconnaissance battalions, created a force capable of executing the find, fix, and finish tasks of the targeting cycle internally. The growth of ISOF necessitated a more significant concentration of USSF on a rotating basis to ensure the concept remained valid. The result has been the longest-enduring relationship between USSF and any foreign military unit and created one of the most successful Iraqi Security Force Organizations.²²³

C. ORGANIZATION AND CAPABILITIES (1973-2019)

The period from the close of the Vietnam War to the Global War on Terrorism has been marked by profound political, technological, and economic environmental change. This fluctuation of the environment combined with the persistent need for relevancy has, at times, created a pendulum effect of focus for USSF. For instance, at times, the force has focused on unilateral, direct operations in support of national or conventional military objective and at others focused on working “by, with, and through” partners and allies to achieve goals.²²⁴ This mission variation has produced some long-term organizational adaptation which has mostly centered on increasing detachment’s lethality. More commonly though, these changes have demanded ad hoc capability adaptation as dictated by the mission and environment.

Perhaps the greatest lethality adaptation which has occurred within the SFOD-A was the creation of the SFOD-A internal Special Operation Tactical Air Controller (SOTAC). Although USSF has always maintained the ability to call in airstrikes, advanced education in precision bombing provided by airpower experts was identified as a need within the SFOD-A during the invasion of Afghanistan. As noted by Dan Schilling, SFOD-

²²³ Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2009), https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Master_9204_29Jan10_FINAL_SIGNED.pdf.

²²⁴ Boyatt, *Unconventional Operations Forces of Special Operations*.

A 595 (one of the initial teams into Afghanistan) self-recognized that “they were ‘yard-saleing’ bombs all over the place” and requested support.²²⁵ To fill the gap in capability, USSF in Afghanistan requested Air Force Joint Terminal Air Controllers (JTAC).²²⁶ However, the increased demand for SFOD-As within the GWOT combined with the precision strike capability offered by manned and unmanned air support outpaced the Air Force’s ability to provide qualified JTACs.²²⁷ This necessitated the development of an additional skill within the SFOD-A.

Almost immediately after the first troops returned from operations in Afghanistan, USSF developed a program to build a Special Operations Tactical Air Controller (SOTAC) with JTAC capability and authority. In the fall of 2002, a pilot program was run at Ft. Bragg and was incorporated into the USSF Warrant Officer Basic Course.²²⁸ After the concept was validated, it became operational and ran the first SOTAC course in December 2002.²²⁹ Between 2002 and 2017, the SOTAC program produced more than 500 graduates and drove requirements for SFOD-As to maintain two qualified SOTAC’s at all times.²³⁰

Similar to the SOTAC course, the Special Forces Advanced Urban Combat Course was initiated by General Boykin, who saw the necessity for urban combat training during his deployment to Somalia.²³¹ This program was then disseminated throughout the active duty groups to increase collective DA skills in an urban environment. In 1999, leaders within the 7th SFG(A), saw the predictions of population growth and urbanization as

²²⁵ Dan Schilling and Lori Chapman Longfritz, *Alone at Dawn: Medal of Honor Recipient John Chapman and the Untold Story of the World’s Deadliest Special Operations Force* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2019), 5.

²²⁶ Schilling and Longfritz, *Alone at Dawn*.

²²⁷ Sean Mulholland, Singleton M.A., and Shannon Boehm, “SOTACC: Training SF Soldiers in Close Air Support and Terminal Air Control,” *Special Warfare* 16, no. 1 (April 2003), <https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/issues/8228>.

²²⁸ Mulholland, M.A., and Boehm, 7.

²²⁹ Mulholland, M.A., and Boehm, 7.

²³⁰ David M. Nolan, “SF JTAC,” *Special Warfare* 30, no. 3 (July 2017): 8–9, https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW3003/30-3_JUL_SEP_2017.pdf.

²³¹ Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, 155.

indicators of future metropolitan conflict and redoubled efforts in SFAUCC training.²³² To prepare their SFOD-As, 7th SFG(A) leaders honed the program to include “34 hours of combat marksmanship, 60 hours advanced urban combat, and 26 hours of general subjects” training.²³³ By the Spring of 2000, the revamped SFAUCC graduated ten 7th SFG(A) SFOD-As and the concept was again disseminated throughout the regiment.²³⁴ This course was undeniably prescient in its creation and lifesaving on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan.

While ad hoc changes are as diverse as the missions that USSF has conducted, there are several worth mentioning because they highlight internal organizational adaptability. Moreover, some of these changes demonstrate the need for a scaled version of a SFOD-As while others highlight the need for additional external capability. In either of these cases, what is telling is that the variety of missions has resulted in an inability to specialize SFOD-As to conduct UW operations.

In terms of scaling up the size of an SFOD-A, the best example is that of Project Blue Light which combined five SFOD-As into one company-sized organization with a CT mission.²³⁵ Just a decade and a half later, SFOD-As conducting SR in the deserts of Iraq and Kuwait justifiably scaled their organizations down to decrease detection risk and increase coverage area.²³⁶ While splitting teams is doctrinally supported and the primary reason for duplication within the SFOD-A, joining teams is doctrinally and culturally unsupported. Moreover, while these adaptations demonstrate the individual flexibility of USSF Soldiers, they fail to demonstrate a true organizational adaptation because they offered more or less of the same capability.

While SFOD-A size has been adjusted dependent upon the demand of the mission at hand, SFOD-As have also proven adept at requesting and incorporating external enablers

²³² Salvatore Cambria, Edward Reeder, and James Kraft, “Warrior Ethos: The Key to Winning,” *Special Warfare* 13, no. 2 (April 2000): 7, <https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/issues/8126>.

²³³ Cambria, Reeder, and Kraft, 7.

²³⁴ Cambria, Reeder, and Kraft, 7.

²³⁵ Stejskal, *Special Forces Berlin*, 1895 of 3604.

²³⁶ Robinson, *Masters of Chaos*, 99.

to cover capability gaps. For example, during the VSO operations in Afghanistan, many SFOD-As requested embedded Military Information Support Operations (MISO) and CA Teams. These additional teams increased detachment's ability to leverage gains within the rural villages of Afghanistan and link them back to the government in Kabul. However, unlike their CIDG predecessor, the VSO operating concept never codified the best practices for the organization of the SFOD-A with enablers. Consequently, some SFOD-As VSO programs were inundated with enablers while others opted for a more minimalist approach.

D. CONCLUSION

From the close of the Vietnam War to the Global War on Terrorism, USSF has conducted a myriad of missions and executed countless ad hoc organizational changes. These changes have been executed as a result of the missions assigned and the environment in which they occurred. The results of a wide variety of missions has enabled USSF to gain and maintain relevancy. Reciprocally though, it has also denied long-term organizational adaptation that would better prepare the SFOD-A to execute its *raison d'être*, UW.

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V. THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

A. A SHIFT IN PRIORITY

In the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), the Trump administration identified great power competition, particularly the growing threats of Russia and China, as primary security concerns for the United States. As demonstrated by recent defense investments, it is clear the U.S. is attempting to counter these threats and others through technological superiority.²³⁷ This “third offset strategy,” a term popularized by former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, seeks to create a technological capability gap so large that it serves as a deterrent against aggressive peer and near peer state actors.²³⁸ The problem, as demonstrated in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Crimea, etc, is that technological superiority does little to dissuade states from employing asymmetric or unconventional operations to combat U.S. interests below the threshold of conventional response.

In his 1948 memorandum, George Kennan highlighted the ability of great powers to use “all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives.”²³⁹ This “political warfare” as Kennan described it, enables nations to advance their strategic objectives through overt and covert actions while mitigating the risk of direct military confrontation. Kennan was not alone in seeing the necessity of options to project national power outside of conventional military confrontation. In 1952, General Robert

²³⁷ For more information regarding U.S. recent defense investments, see: David Larter, “US Navy Signs Mammoth Contract with Huntington Ingalls for Two Aircraft Carriers,” *Defense News*, February 1, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/breaking-news/2019/01/31/us-navy-has-inked-a-contract-for-two-carriers-congressman-says/>; Jon Harper, “Army S&T Money Focused on ‘Big Six’ Priorities,” *National Defense* 102, no. 775 (2018): 8–8.

²³⁸ Chuck Hagel, “Secretary of Defense Speech: Reagan National Defense Forum Keynote,” U.S. Department of Defense, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/606635/reagan-national-defense-forum-keynote/>.

²³⁹ George F. (George Frost) Kennan 1904-2005, “George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare” (April 30, 1948), Obtained and contributed to CWHIP by A. Ross Johnson. Cited in his book *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, Ch1 n4 – NARA release courtesy of Douglas Selvage. Redacted final draft of a memorandum dated May 4, 1948, and published with additional redactions as document 269, FRUS, *Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320>.

McClure and Lieutenant Colonels Aaron Bank and Russel Volkmann founded the U.S. Army Special Forces (USSF).²⁴⁰ For these men, the ability to support resistance and insurgent groups to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or an occupying power was critical to U.S. defense.²⁴¹ These actions which would later be codified under the term Unconventional Warfare (UW) were USSF's raison d'être. Today, USSF remains the only organization in the U.S. military specifically designed to conduct these types of operations.

Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. and the USSR conducted UW operations against one another's interests.²⁴² As the current geopolitical environment returns to a cold war atmosphere, it is unsurprising that our competitors are once again executing UW operations. In fact, as Frank Hoffman argues, U.S. conventional overmatch has incentivized these types of operations.²⁴³ This is also indicative of a change of environment which has seen a decrease in the usefulness of the "weight of numbers and advanced weaponry."²⁴⁴ It is therefore paramount that USSF remains prepared and organized to conduct or combat UW operations with increased frequency. If we do not, then we risk the fate of French leaders at the outbreak of World War II whose minds had become too "inelastic" to realize changes that had occurred to the character of warfare.²⁴⁵

To maximize USSF's competitive advantage to conduct UW operations, it must be organizationally tailored for its operational environment. Preparing for the current environment in an era characterized by rapid change is tantamount to preparing for the last

²⁴⁰ Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets*.

²⁴¹ Department of the Army, *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare Army Training Circular 18-01* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010).

²⁴² Sergey Sukhankin, 'Continuing War by Other Means': *The Case of Wagner, Russia's Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East*, ed. Theodore Karasik and Stephen Blank (Washington, D.C: The Jamestown Foundation, 2018), 290, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Russia-in-the-Middle-East-online.pdf?x87069#page=303>; Joseph L. Votel et al., "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 80 (2016): 101.

²⁴³ Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007).

²⁴⁴ John. Arquilla and Nancy C. Roberts, *Design of Warfare* (Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/62564>.

²⁴⁵ French minds "were too inelastic": Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 36–37, 45 **quoted in** McFate, *The New Rules of War*, 4.

war. Instead, USSF must be organizationally aimed to succeed in the next 10–20 years. This requires an analysis of current global trends and peer activities that will likely play large parts in determining the future environment. It also requires an analysis of previous USSF adaptations to ensure that mistakes of the past are not replicated in the future.

B. THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the world has significantly benefitted from Pax Americana. This has witnessed the breakdown of barriers in communication and economics that had previously been enforced by nation-states. As a result, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the global number of deaths as a result of war declined as well as the percent of the global population living in extreme poverty.²⁴⁶ For the globalists who had predicted that open trade between nations would promote peace, economic prosperity, and establish a more modern world-order, these decades were evidence of truth.²⁴⁷ Buried within this economic prosperity, though, are the trends of globalization, urbanization, and littoralization which are increasingly changing this global environment.

Perhaps the most impactful of the current global trends has been globalization itself. Globalization is an umbrella term used to describe the interconnectivity of the international community as a result of transnational economics and associated technological advancement.²⁴⁸ The combination of these two factors has facilitated a rise in the transfer of capital between countries. As noted by the economist Anthony Giddens, “...the biggest difference is in the level of finance and capital flows. Geared as it is to electronic money – money that exists only as digits in computers – the current world economy has no parallels in earlier times.”²⁴⁹ This accelerated transfer of currency has led to the growth of transnational corporations, which in turn has funded investments in technological and

²⁴⁶ Max Roser, “War and Peace,” *Our World in Data*, December 13, 2016, <https://ourworldindata.org/war-and-peace>; Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, “Global Extreme Poverty,” *Our World in Data*, May 25, 2013, <https://ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty>.

²⁴⁷ Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization Is Reshaping Our Lives* (Taylor & Francis, 2003).

²⁴⁸ Nicholas C. Georgantzas et al., “Giddens’ Globalization: Exploring Dynamic Implications,” in *Proceedings of the 27th System Dynamics Society International Conference*, 2009, 26–30.

²⁴⁹ Giddens, *Runaway World*, 9.

consumer products, particularly those associated with communications. As a result, societies around the world, even those who have been historically isolated from external influences, are being inundated with foreign culture. As Anna Simons notes, in more traditional/tribal communities, this imposition of external influence has resulted in violent reactions or “nativism.”²⁵⁰ As exemplified by Islamist terrorism, this “nativism” can be used to foment insurgencies or induce terrorist actions.²⁵¹

For many emerging societies, globalization has been beneficial to their economies while resources have been plentiful; there is however, a growing downside. As a result of economic growth and increases in the previously mentioned standard of living, the global population has experienced unprecedented and near exponential growth.²⁵² This population growth has not been equally distributed and the majority has taken place in under-developed nations.²⁵³ In some cases, the resultant decline in resources available combined with “small wars,” has caused mass migrations, particularly to littoral areas where trade, as a result of globalization, continues to thrive.²⁵⁴ In other regions, the demand for government provision of security and prosperity has increased making governance progressively more difficult.²⁵⁵ An example of this can be found along Lebanon’s coast, where over a million refugees from the Syrian Civil War have emigrated and threaten to destabilize an already-strained government.

Linked to the demand for better governance is that these issues rarely remain within the confines of the state. This has made singular governments’ management more

²⁵⁰ Anna Simons, “Making Enemies: An Anthropology of Islamist Terror, Part I,” *The American Interest* 1, No. 4, Summer 2006, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/38362>.

²⁵¹ Simons.

²⁵² “United Nations World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights,” *Population and Development Review* 36, no. 4 (2019): 854–55, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2010.00368.x>.

²⁵³ Michael Krepon, *The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation Control in South Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, n.d.), 261–79.

²⁵⁴ David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁵⁵ National Intelligence Council Washington United States, *Global Trends: Paradox of Progress*, (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Council, 2017), 6.

challenging as non-governmental power brokers “block or circumvent political action.”²⁵⁶ Externally, this has resulted in evolving state interests, which in some cases has necessitated the growth of coalitions like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the European Union and in others, led to requests for support from great power states. Internally, though, the inability of governments to meet their populations’ governance demand has left power vacuums which are then filled by Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), insurgents, local strongmen, and/or proxy militias. All of these factors have contributed to the diminishment of state power particularly in the Middle East and Latin America.²⁵⁷

Great power states’ societies have generally been unaffected by the decline of resources and mass migration occurring in emerging countries. This is not to say that these societies are not depleting their own and the world’s resource availability, but rather that the impact has not been felt to the same degree yet and, as a consequence, consumer demand has not yet changed. This is mostly resultant from the positive economic effect of globalization, technological investment, and the build-up of these governments’ militaries as power projection platforms. As the pace of technology development, populations, and consumption increase, the reciprocal demand for resources is also increased. This has and will continue to lead great power states closer to confrontation.²⁵⁸

Figure 6 is a Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) which graphically depicts the current global environment and emphasizes the aforementioned factors which are driving Great Power Competition. CLDs help individuals to “see” problems systemically rather than linearly by mapping the relationship between independent and dependent variables and assigning a positive or negative polarity.²⁵⁹ This polarity indicates whether the independent variable results in the same (positive) or opposite (negative) effect in the

²⁵⁶ Global Trends, “Paradox of Progress,” *National Intelligence Council*, 2017, 6.

²⁵⁷ Trends, 19.

²⁵⁸ Robert R. Schaller, "Moore's Law: Past, Present, and Future," *IEEE Spectrum* 34, no. 6 (1997): 52–59.

²⁵⁹ John. Sterman, *Business Dynamics : Systems Thinking and Modeling for a Complex World* (Boston: Irwin/McGraw-Hill, 2000), 102.

dependent variable. If increasing/decreasing the independent variable causes the dependent variable to increase/decrease beyond what it otherwise would have been, a positive polarity is assigned. Reciprocally, if increasing/decreasing the independent variable causes the dependent variable to decrease/increase beyond what it otherwise would have been, a negative polarity is assigned. With this in mind, a CLD can help analyze a problem as complex as the current global environment through “the identification of the behavior of feedback structures at play within bounded systems and subsystems.”²⁶⁰ The loops formed in this process can be either balancing (opposing exponential growth) or reinforcing (displaying exponential growth)

In this case, three balancing loops (B) demonstrate that economic growth will continue to drive international trade, leading to the depletion of natural resources and compelling the aforementioned state evolution and interest. The reinforcing loop (R) demonstrates that more economic growth will continue to result in greater interconnectedness between peoples and likely result in more “nativism.” The key takeaway from this diagram, though, is the central role that economic growth has played in leading to the current “Great Power Competition.” The outcome of this analysis is that the global trends that have dominated the last two decades stem from globalization and will continue unless otherwise abated. This means that the current environment of “Great Power Competition” will continue in parallel to “small wars.” In fact, nuclear deterrence between great power states increases the likelihood that proxy warfare such as UW will dominate future conflict between great powers.

²⁶⁰ Norman Wayne Porter, “The Value of System Dynamics Modeling in Policy Analytics and Planning,” in *Policy Analytics, Modelling, and Informatics: Innovative Tools for Solving Complex Social Problems*, ed. J. Ramon Gil-Garcia, Theresa A. Pardo, and Luis F. Luna-Reyes (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 262, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-61762-6_6.

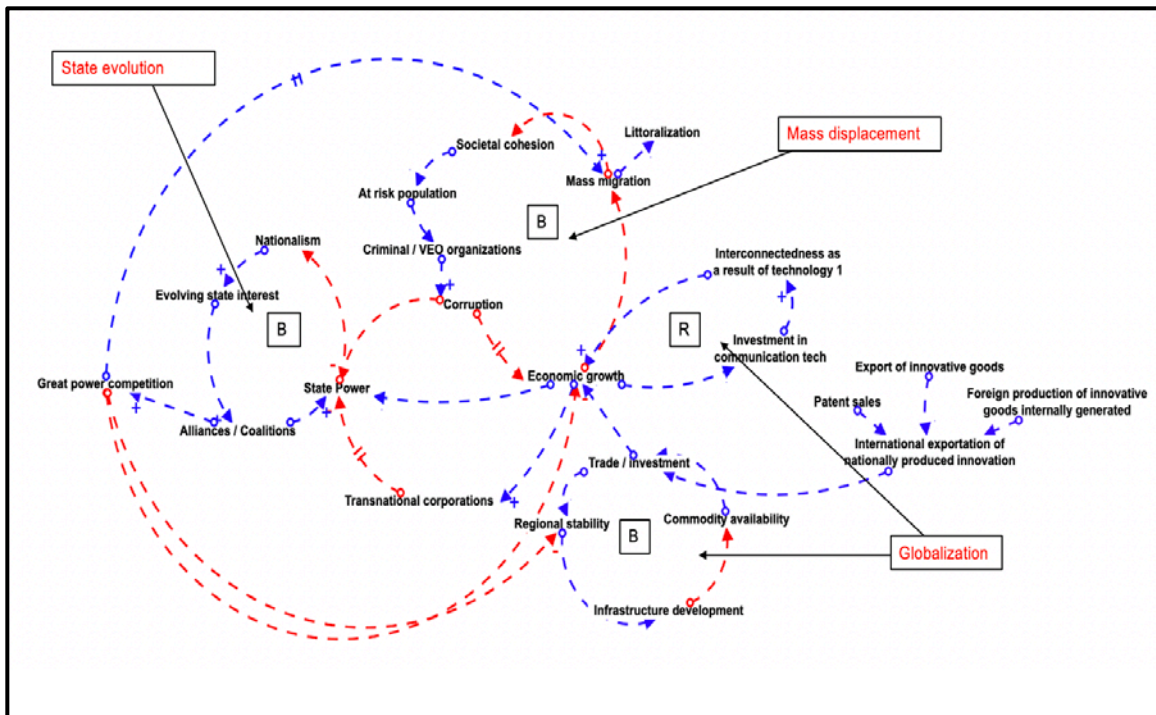


Figure 6. Causal loop diagram of the strategic nature of the environment

C. THE COMPETITIVE SPACE

As the confrontation between the U.S. and its peers / near peers seems inevitable, it is necessary to examine the U.S. defense strategy to determine USSF's role in the future. Perhaps the most important concept of the 2018 National Defense Strategy is the direction to "increase the competitive space."²⁶¹ The Army's recent publication Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) has done an excellent job at reorienting the force toward multi-modal operations designed to penetrate and "dis-integrate" conventional challengers in large-scale battle.²⁶² The goal of this concept is to maintain the inter-domain dominance advantages the Army has benefitted from during the GWOT in the event that great power competition becomes great power combat.

²⁶¹ Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy," 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

²⁶² Department of the Army, *The Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028 TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2018), 525-3-1, https://www.tradoc.army.mil/Portals/14/Documents/MDO/TP525-3-1_30Nov2018.pdf.

SOF's success and consequent growth during GWOT have clearly manifested itself in the MDO concept. However, in its current form, the MDO concept depicts SOF as acting either in support of a larger campaign or preventing instability by building partner capacity.²⁶³ While USSF must be prepared to support a larger strategy by conducting these operations, there is another operation that has even greater strategic utility: UW. As the "only element in the U.S. Armed Forces organized, trained, and equipped specifically for UW," USSF must remain focused, organized, and prepared to conduct these operations.²⁶⁴

To better understand the total value that USSF can provide in this regard, it is necessary to briefly examine the operations of our opponents. These opponents have, through an application of UW and hybrid warfare strategies, routinely "outmaneuvered their seemingly less nimble U.S. competitor."²⁶⁵ This examination is not intended to provide a complete picture of each nation's SOF and UW activities but rather to provide a snapshot of current required capability with which USSF must be prepared to compete.

D. COMPETITIVE WORLD ACTORS

1. Russia

In his 2007 speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, President Putin decried the U.S. dominated global order stating that the "unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world."²⁶⁶ This speech signaled that Russia was not only breaking from the concept of U.S. leadership but also Putin's desire to roll back western advances in the Russian sphere of influence. However, the Russian Army's poor performance during the Georgian War in 2008 made it clear to the Kremlin that competition on the global stage in the 21st century required military reform. In a unique

²⁶³ Department of the Army, 525-3-1.

²⁶⁴ Votel et al., "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," 103.

²⁶⁵ Nathan Freier et al., *Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, 2016), 6.

²⁶⁶ Vladimir Putin, "Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy," *Washington Post* 12 (February 12, 2007), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>.

maneuver in 2008, the Russian military decreased in size while increasing funding by a third.²⁶⁷ The result was an efficient, mobile, and adaptable force which borrowed from traditional Russian military strengths such as maskirovka (deception) and reflexive control as well as from western powers' SOF capability.²⁶⁸ The appointment of General Valery Gerasimov in 2012 and his advocacy for the inclusion of non-military means as a component of war, furthered the new Russian hybrid warfare capability.²⁶⁹ The first test of the revised Russian way of war came in 2013–2014 with the annexation of Crimea and outbreak of violence in the eastern Ukraine.

Following weeks of rioting in Kiev and the departure of the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Yanukovych, the focus of the Kremlin's interest shifted from national control toward annexation of wealthy regions along the Ukraine's eastern border. The first step toward this goal was the annexation of Crimea, a predominantly ethnic Russian region of the country. While western reporters and analysts observed, pro-Russian separatist units took control of key facilities backed by unknown soldiers who wore sterile uniforms. Despite these units being clearly of Russian origin, President Putin's claims that there were no Russian units participating in the secession left western news reporters dumbfounded as to what to label these units, so they became known as "the little green men."

As time progressed, more has become known about these "little green men" and they have gone from shallow anonymity to being recognized as Russian SOF. In the days leading up to the Crimean referendum, Russian SOF quietly infiltrated Crimea to conduct reconnaissance, organize separatist units, create a sense of chaos, and, when the time was right, execute limited direct-action operations.²⁷⁰ These actions, which included the seizure of the Crimean Parliament building, enabled the passage of a secession referendum

²⁶⁷ Maria Snegovaya, *Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2015), 133–35.

²⁶⁸ Timothy Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 2 (2004): 237–56; Tor Bukkvoll, "Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas.(Russian Military Power)," *Parameters* 46, no. 2 (2016): 13.

²⁶⁹ Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight," *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (2016): 23.

²⁷⁰ Bukkvoll, "Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas.(Russian Military Power)."

and the subsequent request for Russian annexation. Throughout this campaign, information operations retained primacy and enabled the Kremlin to shape the environment while simultaneously providing greater “flexibility and efficiency” to the Russian SOF units on the ground.²⁷¹ These actions were so adeptly synchronized that at the time of the Crimean parliament referendum vote, Kiev was still searching for a means to respond. Russian SOF, backed by well-developed information operations, were able to create a *fait accompli* before Kiev or NATO could muster an effective response.²⁷²

Following the Russian annexation of Crimea, additional Russian SOF units began to appear in other regions of Eastern Ukraine. While the Kremlin’s operations in Crimea benefitted from a predominantly ethnic Russian population and local popular support, its UW operations in eastern Ukraine did not. As a consequence, Russian SOF were forced to take a more active role in inciting rebellion, conducting sabotage operations, intelligence collection, and directing attacks against Ukrainian military targets. As early as April 2014, Russian SOF units (again without insignia) were observed training local separatist units in several cities within the Donbas region of the Ukraine.²⁷³ Had it not been for Ukrainian nationalist resistance units, the return of Ukrainian conscription, and sanctions by NATO, the Russian operations in Eastern Ukraine would likely have ended in a similar result as Crimea. Now, even after the deployment of thousands of Russian regulars to the region, combat has ground into stalemate.²⁷⁴ While the fate of the Donbas region remains unclear, what is clear is that 21st century UW requires an adaptable force capable of conducting a range of activities including covert and clandestine operations in support of a detailed information operations campaign. Table 1 highlights the adaptability Russian SOF demonstrated in the Crimea and Donbas campaigns.

²⁷¹ Snegovaya, *Putin’s Information Warfare in Ukraine*, (Washington, DC Institute for the Study of War, 2015), 17; US Army Special Operations Command, “Little Green Men” (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Special Operations Command, 2016), 5.

²⁷² Bukkvoll, “Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas.(Russian Military Power),” 17.

²⁷³ Bukkvoll, 18.

²⁷⁴ US Army Special Operations Command, “Little Green Men”: 60

Table 1. Russian SOF operations in Ukraine.²⁷⁵

	Crimea	Donbas
Direct action		X
Special reconnaissance	X	X
Military assistance		X
Covert action	X	X

The totality of Russian Special Operations cannot be understood without considering its use of Private Military Contractors (PMC) to further its objectives while providing the Kremlin greater deniability. In 2007, the Russian Duma and the Federation Council passed a law allowing companies to legally use arms and “special means” for the procurement and transfer of hydrocarbons.²⁷⁶ This initial narrow focus of Russian PMCs expanded as operations in the Ukraine ground to a stalemate and requests for support began to arrive from Syria, Russia’s strategic partner in the Middle East. While PMC are ostensibly private, their ownership by wealthy oligarchs with direct ties to the Kremlin has made these organizations an extension of Russia’s foreign policy.²⁷⁷ The colocation of the Wagner Group, a premier Russian PMC company, and the 10th Special Forces Brigade as well as its ownership by Yevgeny Prigozhin, an oligarch with direct ties to Putin further validates this fact.²⁷⁸

Whether operating in the Ukraine or in Syria, the Wagner Group’s actions closely mirrored those of other Russian SOF units. This deliberate ambiguity has further provided Putin with deniability of Russian activity while maintaining an adept expeditionary UW

²⁷⁵ Bukkvoll, “Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas.(Russian Military Power),” 20.

²⁷⁶ Sukhankin, ‘*Continuing War by Other Means,*’ 297.

²⁷⁷ Sukhankin, 297.

²⁷⁸ Sukhankin, 301–4.

capability. This force's total capability was put on display when hundreds of Wagner PMC and attached Syrian Army units attacked a U.S. / Kurdish base in Eastern Syria.²⁷⁹

On February 7, 2018, after a week-long build-up of men and materiel, Wagner PMC equipped with T-72 tanks, artillery and mortars attacked a small outpost containing approximately 40 U.S. SOF and Kurdish Syrian Defense Force fighters. While the motivation for this attack was most likely to seize the massive Conoco oil fields, the truly fascinating factor was the tenaciousness of the attackers. As noted by Sean McFate, these forces did not waiver but pressed their attack for four hours under relentless air attack by U.S. rotary and fixed wing aircraft as well as High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS).²⁸⁰ This clearly indicates that the Russian PMC was trained and equipped to fight against an aggressive adversary. Moreover, it demonstrates that Russia is prepared to use its PMCs like SOF to achieve political objectives which, had they originated from a less ambiguous organization, would have been declared an act of war.

2. China

Despite its revolutionary origins and Mao's central role in formulating international UW strategy, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is noticeably lacking a SOF UW capability. This capability gap is especially interesting considering that during the Cold War, China adeptly conducted UW operations as part of its strategy to expand communism throughout Asia. The current gap in a SOF UW force highlights that China's strategy sees no need for the capability. Rather than investing in military UW as a means of power projection, PLA SOF capability more closely resembles that of the U.S. Army Ranger Regiment, which focuses on swift Direct-Action missions in support of a national objective.²⁸¹ This deliberate choice indicates the China's belief that "non-military warfare" is the future form of global competition.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ McFate, *The New Rules of War*, 131.

²⁸⁰ McFate, 132.

²⁸¹ Dave Majumdar, "China's Special Forces Units Are Getting Ready for War," *The National Interest*, July 17, 2018.

²⁸² Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House Arts, 1999).

In what has become a founding document for the PLA's current operations, the book *Unrestricted Warfare* highlighted the need for China to change "the views of what is the key arena for conflict."²⁸³ As Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, the authors of *Unrestricted Warfare*, noted, the release of the "technological plague" represents the opening of a Pandora's box.²⁸⁴ In this case, though, the box comes with a "charm," and leads the authors toward developing several non-military means to achieve China's strategic objectives through political warfare grounded in information control.

Examining China's military capability, which is designed to create "political power for the party, lacks a clear concept for appreciating political warfare."²⁸⁵ However, detailed examination of China's strategy and use of non-military means to effect similar ends as USSF is beyond the scope of this research. Instead, we note that, like Russia, China has weaponized information and adeptly uses it to conduct political warfare.

3. Islamic Republic of Iran

While not referred to as a "great power" in the National Security Strategy, the actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in the realm of UW have been well documented. This matters because, as noted in the Joint Operating Environment 2035, the ability of regional powers to attain global reach will likely result in increased competition throughout multiple domains.²⁸⁶ A brief examination into how regional powers like the IRI have used SOF to hit above their weight class on the geopolitical stage is therefore appropriate.

²⁸³ Dean Cheng, "Unrestricted Warfare: Review Essay II," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 11, no. 1 (2000): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310008423266>.

²⁸⁴ Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 9.

²⁸⁵ Peter Mattis, "China's 'Three Warfares' in Perspective," *War on the Rocks* 30 (2018), <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>.

²⁸⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff-JCS, *Joint Operating Environment JOE 2035: The Joint Force in a Contested and Disordered World. US Joint Chiefs of Staff, J7, Joint Force Development* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2016), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joe_2035_july16.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162059-917.

Almost from its inception, the IRI has been able to asymmetrically oppose U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East through the use of SOF-trained proxy forces. The linkages between the revolution in 1979, the subsequent “republic,” and extremist organizations such as the Palestine Liberation Organization.²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the ability of Iran to oppose U.S. goals and initiatives in the Middle East despite recourse has enabled them to obtain several key strategic objectives. For example, in the early 1980s in Lebanon, the Quds Force, the IRI’s premier SOF unit, was able to train, arm, equip, and advise previously disparate Shia militia groups to join forces under the Lebanese Hezbollah (L.H.) umbrella.²⁸⁸ After just a few years, the fledgling proxy movement was able to force the U.S. and Israeli militaries to withdraw.²⁸⁹

Despite the unprecedented success of LH in the 1980s, it was the IRI’s war with Iraq and realization of conventional weakness that solidified Iran’s affinity for proxies and UW operations.²⁹⁰ This continued focus has enabled LH to achieve not only a standing army with advanced weapons but also political backing as part of an influential block within Lebanon’s government. This move toward local credibility was bolstered by LH’s information dominance. As noted by Hoffman, the transformation of focus was exemplified during the 2006 Lebanon War when “the battle for perception dominance was just as critical as the strategic strike competition and the gritty defense of the villages in southern Lebanon.”²⁹¹ A trained and advised UW force tied to an information warfare dominated strategy was able to produce effects below the threshold of retaliation against the true sponsor.

²⁸⁷ Christos P Ioannides, “The PLO and the Iranian Revolution,” *American-Arab Affairs.*, no. 10 (September 30, 1984): *American-Arab affairs.*, 1984, (10), 89.

²⁸⁸ Shannon W. Caudill, *Hizballah Rising: Iran’s Proxy Warriors* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2008).

²⁸⁹ Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015).

²⁹⁰ Seth Jones, *War by Proxy: Iran’s Growing Footprint in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019), <https://www.csis.org/war-by-proxy>.

²⁹¹ Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, 38.

The scope and proximity of American involvement in the region seems to have no effect on the decision-making calculus of Iran to attempt to thwart U.S. plans through UW. For instance, in Iraq, as early as 2003, the Quds Force began training, equipping, and advising thousands of Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army to counter U.S. military objectives.²⁹² While trainers assisted the Mahdi Army in building its core cadre and development of tactics, the injection of Iranian technology to increase the human cost of U.S. involvement in Iraq had a hastening effect on the U.S. withdrawal. The ability of Iran to compete with the U.S. asymmetrically through the use of UW proxies and information warfare dominance again enabled strategic effects.

Since the U.S. departure from Iraq in 2011, subsequent regional civil wars saw the IRI’s need for capable SOF grow (see Figure 7). In Syria, the ability of Iranian Quds Force to work alongside the Syrian Army is an illustration of Foreign Internal Defense as described in the U.S. Army’s Multi-Domain Operations Training Circular.²⁹³ Here, the Quds force exemplified a long-held belief within USSF that the best UW force can also provide the best assistance in a Counter-Insurgency campaign. For instance, shortly after arriving, Quds Force officers “encourage [d] Assad to restore access to social media internet sites he had blocked and then showed the Syrians how to track [and target] opponents through their Facebook and Twitter accounts.”²⁹⁴ As noted in a recent study by the Army War College, “the IRI thrives by asserting itself into fragile sometimes disordered environments.”²⁹⁵

²⁹² Michael R. Gordon and Dexter Filkins, “Hezbollah Said to Help Shiite Army in Iraq,” *New York Times* 27 (November 28, 2006), <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/28/world/middleeast/28military.html>.

²⁹³ Department of the Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1*.

²⁹⁴ Steven O’Hern, *Iran’s Revolutionary Guard: The Threat That Grows While America Sleeps* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, Inc., 2012), 95.

²⁹⁵ Freier et al., *Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone*, 49.

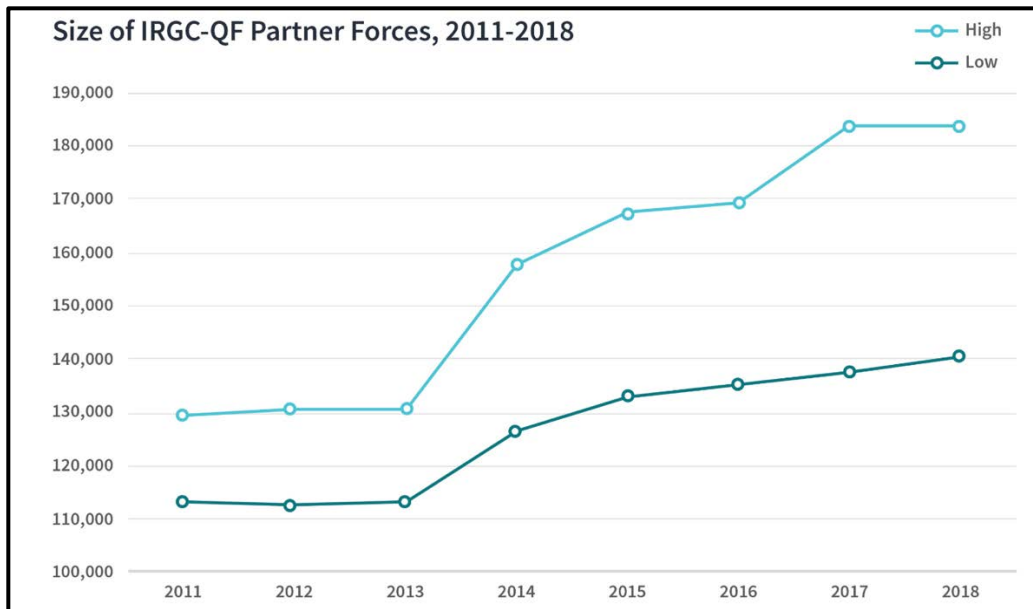


Figure 7. Estimation of Quds Force partners 2011–2018.²⁹⁶

While the IRI was in the middle of supporting the Assad regime in western Syria, the civil war spilled out of the country to the east and into Iraq. This threatened to undo the decade of progress the IRI had made in Iraq and represented a strategic problem for the IRI. Once again, the IRI was able to capitalize on weakness and instability to attain greater control over its neighbor. As ISIS forces marched through Mosul and Fallujah and threatened Baghdad, many Iraqi volunteers opted to join the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) rather than the collapsing Iraqi military and police units. These PMF forces backed by Iran swelled in strength and in political reputation or as one PMF fighter stated: “you can criticize any politician or even religious cleric, but you cannot speak against the Hashd [PMF] and its martyrs.”²⁹⁷ The effect of this standing “heroes army” in Iraq has been to create further division within the political sphere to enable greater opportunities for Iranian influence and control. Moreover, this provides an example of how the IRI through the employment of adaptable SOF was able to support conventional forces in one region while building an irregular force in a neighboring country simultaneously.

²⁹⁶ Jones, *War by Proxy*.

²⁹⁷ Renad Mansour and Fālih ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq’s Future*, vol. 28 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), 3.

VI. CONCLUSION

A. THE FUTURE ENVIRONMENT

While many scholars, experts, and defense analysts have prophesied about the future of warfare, most have focused on the technological aspects about the future of warfare. As a result, futurist literature is replete with predictions of cyber Armageddon scenarios which then drive investment and focus from the DoD into acquiring more technology.²⁹⁸ While developing and incorporating new and revolutionary technological advancements is critical to the success of the SFOD-A, the reality will be quite like the past competitive environment of the cold war. Rather than massed armies invading territories or truly crippling cyber-attacks, modern warfare seeks to advance the political agendas of the state strictly below the threshold for conventional war. However, whether by conventional or irregular means, modern war but still capable of producing political end-states. As a result, our opponents in the modern continuum are increasing their capacity to conduct warfare below the threshold of a conventional response while still eliciting positive results.²⁹⁹

Whether it is called political warfare, information warfare, or UW, the ability to influence the mind of the population remains the center of gravity and should be the focus for increasing lethality for the SFOD-A. As demonstrated previously in Chapter V, as economic growth and relative international prosperity continue to increase, the likelihood of this (what this?) form of warfare increases. It is therefore necessary for the U.S. military to maintain a force organized to be capable of either conducting or defeating these operations with regularity. Current USASOC strategy dictates that for ARSOF to be competitive in the future environment, one of the essential risks necessary for enabling success it to divest of legacy missions and force structure.(add USASOC strategy citation) This future force cannot be massed formations but rather ought to be smaller units equipped

²⁹⁸ McFate, *The New Rules of War*.

²⁹⁹ United States Army Special Operations Command, *Army Special Operations Forces Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019), 2, https://www.soc.mil/AssortedPages/ARSOF_Strategy.pdf.

and empowered with the requisite capabilities and permissions to accomplish this mission. As noted by T.E. Lawrence, “the smaller the unit the better its performance.”³⁰⁰

B. ORGANIZATION AND CAPABILITIES (FUTURE)

As noted by the first SFOD-A model in Chapter II, the current environment of Great Power Competition (GPC) emulates a similar environment which the U.S. faced during the Cold War. When assessing the future capability of the SFOD-A, it is therefore necessary to examine the capability of the SFOD-A during the Cold War. However, as terrorists continue to threaten our nation, it is also necessary to examine the capabilities of the SFOD-A throughout the GWOT to ensure that those valuable lessons learned are not forgotten. Therefore, any recommended change to the SFOD-A cannot be a step backward but must rather build upon existing capability. To that end, the following recommended change is a combination of the examination of the past, the current global trends and most likely future environment.

The current focus of the U.S. military’s manning, training, and equipping for potential large-scale ground combat is likely to require additional SOF capabilities and operations. This increased requirement for SOF capabilities will occur for three reasons. First, the increased capability of our conventional forces and the United States’ nuclear deterrence, will most likely mean a return to a “cold-war atmosphere” requiring an increase in covert and clandestine deployments, not large-scale wars. Second, adversaries like Russia, China, and Iran, will continue to turn toward asymmetric options to create room within the competitive space to achieve their interests. These operations will, by design, deny the U.S. the ability to respond conventionally. Finally, as has been the case since President Eisenhower’s administration, a primary means that the United States will employ to counter aggression will be through the development of partners and allies. Following historic precedent, the force that will be most heavily relied upon for these operations will be USSF.

³⁰⁰ Thomas Edward Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Penguin UK, 2000), 69.

Adversarial investment in asymmetric means to achieve effects does not mean that the U.S. should divest of large-scale conventional capability as this would give up conventional deterrence. However, the shift in focus by the conventional military may give state and non-state actors additional space to develop into more robust networks with increased capability. This capability increase has the potential to edge the U.S. out of the competitive space changing the status quo of U.S. hegemony. Therefore, it is incumbent upon USSF to cover any gaps left by the transition of focus. To do this appropriately, USSF must modernize in parallel though not in mirror as it did while supporting the AirLand Battle operating concept.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) identified that U.S. adversaries are already creating leverage in the competitive space by weaponizing information to gain effects without provoking a conventional military response.³⁰¹ To combat this threat, the USASOC Commander, has directed the force to “power-down” mission command to the lowest levels to achieve success.³⁰² The strategy goes on to state that USASOC “will expand and leverage our irregular warfare capabilities and partnership networks [while operationalizing] the CONUS base whenever possible to support information warfare.”³⁰³ Finally, the strategy states that readiness success “will be achieved using cyber and information warfare in all aspects of training.”³⁰⁴ As defined by ADP 3–05 Army Special Operations, “in today’s complex and rapidly evolving information environment, perceptions, decisions, and, ultimately, behavior are influenced by the psychological effects of actions and information.”³⁰⁵ Following the USASOC Commander’s “power-down” guidance it is necessary to incorporate information operations capability at the lowest level.

³⁰¹ United States Army Special Operations Command, *Army Special Operations Forces Strategy*.

³⁰² United States Army Special Operations Command.

³⁰³ United States Army Special Operations Command.

³⁰⁴ United States Army Special Operations Command.

³⁰⁵ Department of the Army, *Army Special Operations, ADP 3-05* (Washington, DC: Army Doctrine Reference Publication, 2019), 2–11.

Historically, SFOD-As have relied upon PSYOP attachments to achieve information dominance. Like the challenges which SOF face in continually providing relevance to conventional commanders. These attachments have performed well in past conflicts, and in the case of the CIDG, have resulted in short-term organizational adaptation of the SFOD-A. This temporary additive capability enhancement was again reflected during VSO operations in Afghanistan highlighting the fact that while PSYOP is a core competency of USSF, it is something that individual soldiers receive little training on and are almost never validated in. If USSF is to be successful in Great Power Competition by gaining information dominance, it is necessary to exceed the capability of U.S. adversaries to leverage information. This means that rather than simply attaching PSYOP specialists to a SFOD-A when necessary, information dominance must be the umbrella under which all other operations take place. This is unlikely to happen if it is not trained consistently within the SFOD-A and integrated throughout operational planning and execution.

To meet the stated goals of the USASOC strategy, excel in the current environment, and remain operationally and strategically relevant, the authors recommend the creation of an additional PSYOP skill within the SFOD-A. This should be done without adding additional personnel to the unit, as this would also bring an untold number of logistical adjustments. The capability adaptation should instead be treated as an individual skill with associated MOS identification, like SOTACs. By having a subject matter expert embedded and advising SFOD-A commanders, it would provide a “bottom up” approach toward building the information umbrella that is ubiquitous during modern U.W. and COIN.

As USSF prepares to modernize in support of Great Power Competition, incorporating PSYOP skills will enhance partners efforts to recruit and build popular support. As partners’ capability increases, the indigenous approach that USSF is best suited for will be reinforced. This increase in relevancy will decrease the likelihood of adaptations of USSF for unilateral / direct roles such as were seen during the post-Vietnam time period. Moreover, as other SOF units begin to modernize, it is likely that they will focus heavily on their respective core capabilities. The reinforcement of focus of USSF on indigenous populations through partner operations under an information dominance umbrella will ensure the U.S. is not left with a capability gap.

The individual training for the USSF soldier should be done without creating an additional course at the John F. Kennedy Special Forces Center and School (SWCS), as this would necessarily mean additional soldiers being removed from their detachments to serve as instructors. As the current PSYOP course falls under SWCS and is manned by individuals with years of PSYOP experience, SWCS should reserve billets for USSF soldiers to attend relevant sections of the PSYOP course. In so doing, SWCS would enable an expedited course for USSF soldiers who already have core SOF capabilities such as language training and small unit tactics. Equipping these soldiers with necessary equipment at the SFOD-A would accrue cost but this could be diffused by dual using equipment such as cameras and computers that are already organic to the SFOD-A.

Finally, the addition of USSF PSYOP specialists on the SFOD-A would not have no negative effect on the relevancy of traditional PSYOP specialists. As necessary, SFOD-As should still request Tactical PSYOP Teams (TPT) to augment their deployments but instead of these teams working on basic PSYOP tasks, they would enable larger distribution and messaging. This would reciprocally enhance the information dominance umbrella of the SFOD-As operations while having the added benefit of decreasing tribalism between the two branches.

As USSF prepares to modernize in support of Great Power Competition, it is necessary to understand historic modernization efforts that resulted in the adaptation of the SFOD-A. With a sound understanding of the environment and missions that drove these adaptations, it becomes clear that the prevailing cause of transformation was the desire to remain relevant. If USSF is to stay ahead of the relevancy curve, it stands to reason that information dominance at the lowest level is critical to the success of operations in the information age. However, while this is one recommended change, the intention of this thesis has been to provide future research with a solid historic grounding from which to spring future organizational adaptation of the SFOD-A.

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